

Becoming A New Age University: Sustainable University Model of MSU



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Mingachevir State University's (MSU) main strategic goals are to be included in the top five national universities of Azerbaijan, to become a driver of regional development and innovation ecosystem and to become a New Age University. To achieve these goals, MSU is promoting the transformation of the University towards sustainable development, which involves complex actions that take into account the current realities and potential opportunities of the University. The University also pays particular attention for improving the content of scientific research, increasing the use of modern methods and building scientific activity on a result-oriented approach. MSU is also actively involved in international cooperation, including student and teacher exchange programs, joint participation in Erasmus+ programs, conducting joint scientific research and holding joint scientific conferences.

In order to become a New Age University that promotes sustainable development, MSU has set out a clear strategy

that aligns with global and national policies. By prioritizing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 on Quality Education and SDG 4.7 on Education for Sustainable Development, MSU is positioning itself to be at the forefront of the sustainability movement in Azerbaijan. The University puts efforts into contributing to the national state policy regarding sustainable development in Azerbaijan, formed by the government and particularly within the National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development.

MSU aims to accomplish its sustainability goals through strong leadership commitment, fostering a social network that emphasizes cooperation, collaboration, and co-creation, encouraging participation in decision-making processes, promoting education and learning for sustainable development, integrating sustainability research across disciplines, and implementing performance management practices that measure and improve progress towards sustainability. By focusing on these areas, MSU hopes to make significant strides towards creating a more sustainable and prosperous future for Azerbaijan and the wider world.

MSU's Sustainable University Model is centered on three approaches: academic, internal and external. The academic approach focuses on providing interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary knowledge, skills, competences, and values. The University accomplishes this through research and innovation, such as publishing a scientific journal and establishing Sustainable Development and Regional Innovation Research Center, as well as hosting conferences, seminars, and workshops. The education and experience aspect of this approach includes undergraduate programs in Engineering and IT faculties, a Master's program in Economics and Management Faculty, and future PhD programs in the Education Faculty. The internal approach emphasizes campus and campus life, where the University encourages sustainable practices, such as energy and water efficiency, waste management, and equity, while ensuring the health, safety, and access of disabled persons. The external approach involves engaging the wider community, ecosystem, and the world through international cooperation, e-learning and certificate programs, NGO and platform collaborations,



career development, and involvement with municipalities, mass media, governmental agencies, research communities, and the private sector. Finally, the University's value system emphasizes the importance of an organizational culture that embodies University social responsibility and academic ethics.

Academic approach

Through the University's academic approach, MSU is committed to promote sustainable development through research and innovation. To achieve this goal, the University has undertaken various initiatives, such as the creation of a Sustainable Development and Regional Innovation Research Center, publishing multidisciplinary scientific journal of sustainable development, and the implementation of sustainable development strategies in academic departments. Along with hosting annual international conferences and seminars, MSU has established a Student Scientific Society and Student Startup Teams. The University's research topics are aligned with sustainable development goals, covering areas such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, environmental economics, green energy, poverty reduction, and intercultural communication. Its efforts towards sustainable development have already started to have a positive impact on society.

In line with MSU's academic approach to its commitment towards sustainable development, "Dayanıqlı İnkişaf" ("Sustainable Development") journal is a multidisciplinary scientific journal established by the University in 2020. The journal aims to publish high-quality, original, and research-oriented multidisciplinary articles in the fields of economics, pedagogy, and engineering, and has been published in two volumes a year since 2021 in Azerbaijani, Turkish, Russian, and English. The journal is registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan and is sent to the libraries of higher education institutions in Azerbaijan and many other countries. The journal contributes to the MSU's strategic goals by providing a platform for scholars and researchers from various countries to share their research findings and knowledge, which can help to promote the University's reputation and visibility. Moreover, the journal's focus on sustainable development can help to promote sustainable practices and solutions in various fields, which is

essential for achieving global sustainability goals. Overall, the "Dayanıqlı İnkişaf" journal is a valuable resource for scholars, researchers, and policymakers interested in sustainable development and multidisciplinary research.

Furthermore, the establishment of a Sustainable Development and Regional Innovation Research Center at MSU has a positive impact on the University's sustainable development goals and benefit the wider community. By focusing on research topics aligned with sustainable development, the research center can provide valuable insights and solutions to some of the pressing issues faced by society today. Moreover, hosting conferences related to sustainable development brings together researchers, policymakers, and industry leaders, creating a platform for sharing knowledge and best practices to drive innovation and promote sustainable growth. Through its research and outreach activities, the center helps to position the University as a driver of regional development and innovation ecosystem, contributing to the creation of a sustainable and prosperous future for the University and the wider community.

Mingachevir State University has made significant strides in promoting research and innovation, as well as establishing itself as a reliable international partner in academia and sustainable development. The university hosts several national and international research conferences each year, providing a platform for scientists, academics, and researchers from different countries to exchange knowledge, ideas, and best practices in various fields, including sustainable development. One of the university's recent conferences, the Hoca Ahmed Yesevi International Scientific Research Conference, jointly organized with Turkey's Economic Development and Social Research Institute, was held in hybrid format on February 24, 2023. The conference attracted academic staff and scholars from many countries' higher education institutions and research institutes. Another notable conference, jointly organized by the Institute of Economics of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences and MSU, was held on May 17, 2022, with the aim of strengthening scientific cooperation. This conference featured speeches on topics such as public-private cooperation in financing the rehabilitation and reconstruction of post-conflict territories and the environmental framework of innovative economic development of Azerbaijan.

Moreover, the International Conference on "Sustainable Development Strategy: Global Trends, National Experiences, and New Goals," hosted by MSU every other year is a significant step towards achieving the university's goals of research and innovation on sustainable development and being a reliable international partner while building its reputation. The conference, supported by the Ministries of Education and Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the UN Mission in Azerbaijan, the Mayor's Office of Mingachevir city, is the first international scientific conference in the history of the university. The conference focuses on the national priorities for socio-economic development of Azerbaijan by 2030 and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. It covers a wide range of topics related to sustainable development, such as global trends in sustainable



development, balanced regional development, ensuring ecological sustainability, modern trends in energy sector development, and the role of innovation in post-pandemic economic recovery.

The conference provides an excellent opportunity for scientists, experts, and policymakers from different countries to share their experiences and ideas on sustainable development and contribute to creating a sustainable future for all. Overall, MSU's national and international research conferences have helped the university establish its reputation as a reliable partner in academia and sustainable development.

Internal approach

MSU's internal approach towards sustainable development includes various measures to promote a green campus, energy and water efficiency, waste management, and accessibility for disabled individuals. The University's plans to build a new green campus embody these principles, aiming to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students and staff.

The new campus will be designed as an innovation hub to promote technology transfer and support the University's research activities. The campus will incorporate smart and sustainable features, such as waste management, energy efficiency, and water efficiency, to minimize its impact on the environment. The new campus will also prioritize safety, health, equity, and property, providing a safe and inclusive environment for students, staff, and the wider community.

In addition to the green features, the new campus will encourage green transportation, such as bicycle paths, promoting a healthy and active lifestyle for students, staff, and the surrounding community. MSU's commitment to creating a sustainable campus reflects its strategic goal of becoming a New Age University, offering cutting-edge education and services to its students and staff.

MSU's digitalization efforts have also greatly benefited its students and staff. The IT center provides essential technological infrastructure, including high-speed internet access, IT-equipped classrooms, and e-documentation. This

infrastructure allows for the implementation of e-learning materials, presentations, and video lessons, enabling students to access distance lessons at partner universities. MSU also provides online conferences, workshops, and webinars, as well as digital publications, offering flexible and accessible learning opportunities.

Overall, MSU's internal approach towards sustainable development and digitalization efforts align with its strategic goal of becoming a top university in Azerbaijan. The new green campus and digitalization efforts will further cement MSU's reputation as an innovative and sustainable Higher Education Institution.

External Approach

MSU has also taken an external approach to meeting its strategic goals of sustainability and becoming a top university by prioritizing international cooperation and partnerships. For example, MSU has earned membership in the International Association of Universities (IAU) which can provide the University with a range of opportunities and resources that can help it achieve its goals and promote sustainable development. As a member of IAU, MSU can benefit from the organization's expertise and trends analysis, publications and portals, advisory services, peer-to-peer learning, events, and global advocacy. MSU can also become an active participant in IAU working groups and activities, including those focused on leadership, internationalization, sustainable development and digital transformation.

As a member of IAU, MSU can collaborate with other universities and institutions around the world to share experiences and find solutions to local problems that benefit local communities. This collaboration can help MSU develop inter-institutional collaboration in pursuit of sustainable development, as advocated by IAU in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By embedding sustainable development concepts and principles in its strategic planning, academic and organizational work, MSU can contribute to the future well-being of humanity and the planet.

The election of MSU's Rector to the Administrative Board of IAU can also provide MSU with a direct voice in the main





governing unit of the Association. This position can enable MSU to influence decision-making processes and promote its goals and initiatives on a global stage. MSU can also benefit from the expertise and insights of other members of the Administrative Board, who come from diverse backgrounds and represent different regions of the world.

Overall, membership in IAU and the Rector's position in the Administrative Board can help MSU work towards its goals and promote sustainable development by providing access to resources, expertise, and opportunities for collaboration with other universities and institutions around the world. This can help MSU become a reliable international partner in promoting sustainable development and contributing to the global common good.

MSU has also achieved success in the international field by winning the "Erasmus+" project "ENGAGE," which is in line with the University's strategic goals of sustainable development and modernization. The project aims to enhance the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Azerbaijani higher education institutions, develop entrepreneurial mindsets, and promote innovation. The action plan includes fostering innovative ideas, expanding start-up activities, and promoting university-industry collaboration, which aligns with MSU's objective of becoming a catalyst for regional development and innovation. By prioritizing international cooperation and learning from leading foreign universities, MSU demonstrates its commitment to sustainable development and takes advantage of the opportunities offered by the EU's "Erasmus+" program. In addition to these achievements, MSU has established a number of international partnerships with various universities across the world, including Gazi University, Haci Bayram Veli University, KTO Karatay University, Yildiz Technical University, Gedik University (all from Türkiye), University of Valladolid (Spain), University of Siegen (Germany), Mycolas Romeris University (Lithuania), Kyrgyz Economic University (Kyrgyz Republic) and Abai University (Kazakhstan), among

others. These partnerships have resulted in a range of joint activities, including mutual visits, signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), student and staff exchange, joint conferences, seminars, and forums, as well as international and training programs.

Furthermore, MSU has established a Career and Development Center, involved visiting professors, and supported the doctoral education of young university staff abroad through these partnerships. In the future, MSU aims to establish joint research centers, conduct joint research, prepare joint scientific papers, integrate master's degree programs, implement joint projects for regional development, and create modern business incubators and startup culture through its international partnerships. These targets can help MSU become a leading institution in promoting sustainable development and innovation, while also creating opportunities for students, staff, and the wider community to benefit from global academic collaborations.

MSU's dedication to advancing global engagement and fostering intercultural dialogue can also be seen through its collaborative efforts with the Embassy of the United States of America in Baku. As part of this mission, MSU has recently become a host institution for American US Department of State exchange program participants and scholars. During the 2022-2023 academic year, the University hosted a Fulbright US Student Program English Teaching Assistant (ETA), whose role was to enhance the English language proficiency of students and staff while promoting citizen-to-citizen relations between Azerbaijan and the United States. Going forward, MSU plans to continue hosting American exchange program participants, including specialists in TESOL and other areas. Furthermore, MSU's Foreign Language Department collaborates with EducationUSA to offer a College Prep Club (CPC) for highly motivated English-speaking students who aspire to study in the USA and make meaningful contributions





to their local communities in Azerbaijan. The CPC, which is free of charge to selected students, provides pre-IELTS lessons and scholarship advising, and is organized by a local advisor with the assistance of a Fulbright ETA. Through these collaborative efforts, MSU and its partners are committed to promoting cultural exchange, enhancing language skills, and fostering closer ties between Azerbaijan and the United States.

MSU has developed partnerships with various local institutions and organizations to enhance the quality of education, promote regional development, and increase community engagement. The University has collaborated with leading national universities, including Baku State University, Azerbaijan State University of Economics, Azerbaijan Technical University, Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University and others. Joint activities with these institutions include student and staff exchange, joint conferences and seminars, training, and involvement of professors to support doctoral education and professional development of young university staff. MSU aims to align with leading national universities to gain the best education experience, implement joint certification programs, and create new undergraduate programs.

In addition to partnerships with universities, MSU has also established collaborations with public institutions, such as the Ministry of Science and Education, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the Mayor's Office of Mingachevir city, the State Tourism Agency, SOCAR and the AzerEnerji JSC, among others. Joint activities with these institutions include support for the construction of a new campus, the university's participation in regional development projects, and conducting information sessions on implemented projects. MSU's partnership with educational platforms, such as T-network, EDHUB, and Resource HUB, aims to build the capacity of academic and administrative staff, develop comprehensive skills for students, and increase the University's contribution to regional community-oriented projects.

Moreover, MSU has also established collaborations with several local industries, such as Mingachevir Industrial Park, Azerbaijan Thermal Powerplant, and HiTech Invest Company to promote employment, joint research, innovation development, curriculum development, experience, and internship programs.

MSU's partnership with traditional and social media aims to increase public accountability and transparency in university management by providing information support to events and sharing all information and news related to the University's activities.

Through its collaborations, MSU aims to achieve its goals of enhancing the quality of education, promoting regional development, and increasing community engagement.

In conclusion, MSU is taking significant steps to become a New Age University by prioritizing sustainable development and innovation. The University's main strategic goals are to be included in the top five national universities in Azerbaijan, become a driver of regional development and innovation ecosystem, and ultimately become a New Age University. With implementation of the green campus concept, MSU is not only creating a favorable environment for transforming "green" ideas and initiatives into reality, but also training specialists with a sustainable development mindset. By collaborating with local and foreign universities, becoming a reliable partner in university-industry relationships, and providing modern university environments and student life, MSU is well on its way to achieving its goals of becoming a leading higher education institution in Azerbaijan and the wider region.

Biography of our guest

Dr. Shahin Bayramov is appointed a Rector of Mingachevir State University (MSU), since July, 2019. Before appointment to MSU, he was a Vice-Rector for International Affairs and Programs at Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC) from 2012 to 2017.

He is elected an Administrative Board Member of the International Association of Universities (IAU) as of October, 2022. Over the last years, Dr. Bayramov also held different duties within academic sector - Deputy-Director of Research and Higher Education Department at the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2017 - 2019), Azerbaijan's Coordinator at the Bologna Follow-Up Group of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (2017-2020), Twinning Project Country Leader on "Support to Strengthening the Higher Education System in Azerbaijan" (2018 - 2020), Expert of the Science and Education Committee of the National Assembly (Parliament) of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2006 – 2015), etc. Also, he used to be an expert in several international projects financed by UNIDO, WTO, USAID, USTDA, etc.

Dr. Bayramov completed Graduate Study in Higher Education Administration and Academic Leadership from College of Education at the Penn State University (USA, 2016). Also, completed Professional Development Programs from Zhejiang Normal University (China, 2018), Cornell University (USA, 2016), University of Warwick (UK, 2015) and Indiana University (USA, 2009).