

From Green to Inclusive: Social Work, Epistemology and Sustainability at Global Conference in Vietnam

The 2nd Global Conference on Sustainability in Economics, Business and Law (SEBL 2025), held on 21 November 2025 at the University of Economics and Law (UEL), Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City, brought together international experts to examine how digital and green transitions can be effectively integrated to promote sustainable futures. In his opening remarks, Assoc. Prof. Dr Hoang Cong Gia Khanh, Rector of UEL, underlined the ambition of the conference: to explore how digital transformation can be combined with green transformation to build a future that is prosperous, inclusive, responsible and resilient. He emphasised UEL's commitment to promoting national sustainable development through research, innovation, education and community engagement in economics, business administration and law.

Within this context, Dr Damian Spiteri, a lecturer in social work at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work within the Faculty of Social Wellbeing, University of Malta, served as a key speaker during the pre-conference programme. In his address on social inclusion within sustainability agendas, he argued that research on sustainability must move beyond a narrow focus on carbon targets, technology and finance to interrogate its own epistemological and ontological foundations. He invited academics, practitioners and students to reflect on whose knowledge counts, whose experiences are recognised, and what kinds of social realities are assumed when defining "sustainable" futures.

Building on this critique, Dr Spiteri highlighted how the treatment of migrants, disabled persons, vulnerable workers and marginalised communities remains an overlooked dimension in many sustainability strategies. He stressed that no transition towards "green" and "digital" futures can be considered genuinely sustainable if it rests on exclusionary assumptions or leaves these groups behind. Through this perspective, he positioned the University of Malta as an active and visible partner in global sustainability debates and drew attention to Malta's experience of managing rapid economic change while striving to safeguard social cohesion and inclusion. His interventions were noted for their capacity to bridge disciplines and cultures, influencing several of the discussions that followed.

The broader programme of SEBL 2025 included key presentations by Professor Angappa Asari Gunasekaran (Pennsylvania State University, USA) on the role of generative AI in enhancing global supply chain capacity; Professor Agnieszka Głodowska (Krakow University of Economics, Poland) on gender barriers in international trade; Professor Dominik Bierecki (Pomeranian University in Słupsk, Poland) on cooperatives in the context of green and digital transformation; and Assoc. Prof. Dr Tran Thi Hong Lien (University of Economics and Law) on the application of AI in unstructured data collection for leadership and corporate governance research.

During the parallel sessions, Dr Spiteri also presented a co-authored paper with Trong-Hieu-Khang Dinh, titled *From Green to Inclusive: Promoting Socially Inclusive Sustainability Practices – A Comparative Case Study of Vietnam and Malta*. The paper critiques the tendency of ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) frameworks to underplay the social (“S”) dimension and asks how companies can move beyond being merely “green” to becoming genuinely socially inclusive. To address this, the authors propose an “Inclusive ESG” (I’ESG) perspective, in which inclusiveness is conceived as a principle running through all three ESG dimensions rather than being limited to the social pillar. This reframing presents sustainability as a dynamic, context-sensitive process attentive to inequality and power relations, rather than a technical checklist. Together with his keynote address, this contribution enabled Dr Spiteri to play a distinctive role at SEBL 2025 and further reinforced the University of Malta’s visibility in global debates on inclusive sustainability.

