Problem:

In Romania, a legally regulated system requires stores to charge a deposit for every bottle (plastic or glass) sold. Customers receive this deposit back when they return the bottle to designated recycling stations located within the stores. However, not all types of packaging fall under this regulation. Items like coffee cups, bags (both paper and plastic), pizza boxes, and other similar packaging are very often not included . Although these items are recyclable and there are dedicated collection points, they are often mixed with household waste and are rarely separated for recycling. As a result, most of this packaging ends up as general waste rather than being recycled.

Solution:

This solution focuses on increasing recycling of commonly discarded packaging (like coffee cups, bags, and food containers) on university campuses, where both the student population and waste volume are significant. Here's how it works:

Dedicated Recycling Stations with Student Authentication: Special recycling stations are set up across the campus, exclusively for items not covered by the national bottle deposit system. Students authenticate their identity at these stations using a QR code linked to their student credentials, ensuring only authorized users access the system.

Integration with University App: An extension within the existing student app allows users to locate the nearest recycling stations based on their location. This feature makes recycling points highly accessible, while also tracking individual recycling contributions in real-time.

Point System for Recycling Incentives: Each item recycled at these stations is tracked, with students earning points for each item they properly dispose of. The system ranks the top recyclers, and every three months, the top 10-25 students receive rewards—like merchandise or vouchers—sponsored by university partners who support this sustainability initiative.

Participatory Budgeting through Points: Beyond rewards, students can use their points to vote for sustainability projects they'd like to see implemented on campus (such as green spaces, study lounges, or community gardens). Every quarter, the university and its partners commit to bringing the top-voted projects to life, based on accumulated points from students.

This solution not only boosts recycling rates but also engages students in meaningful campus improvements, giving them direct influence over how their collective efforts contribute to a better, more sustainable university environment.

Impact

This idea has the potential to significantly reduce campus waste, foster a culture of sustainability among students, and create a cleaner, greener university environment. By turning recycling into a rewarding and participatory experience, it empowers students to make tangible contributions to both campus improvements and environmental impact.

For partner companies, this initiative offers a unique opportunity to align their brand with sustainability, demonstrating their commitment to environmental responsibility in a highly visible, impactful way. By donating rewards and supporting campus projects, they gain positive brand exposure among students—a key audience of future professionals and consumers—and strengthen their reputation as community-focused, eco-conscious organizations.

For the university, the program enhances campus sustainability, reduces waste management costs, and boosts its reputation as an innovative, forward-thinking institution. It also fosters student engagement and pride in their campus, as students see their collective actions result in real improvements. This participatory approach to campus development not only supports environmental goals but also builds a stronger, more connected student community.

Costs:

- Recycling Stations Setup
- App Integration and Development, design, maintainance
- Rewards System
- Participatory Project Budgeting:
  - Cost: Funding for campus improvement projects selected by students.
- Marketing Campaigns
- Operational and Maintenance Costs

Total Estimated Budget (Annually)

Category	Low Range Estimate	High Range Estimate
Recycling Stations Setup	$3,000	$10,000
App Integration and Development	$5,000	$15,000
Incentive and Rewards System	$2,000	$2,000
Participatory Project Budgeting	$5,000	$15,000
Marketing and Awareness Campaigns	$1,500	$2,000
Operational and Maintenance Costs	$3,200	$4,400
Total Annual Budget	**$19,700**	**$48,400**