Ecology Awareness of Sustainable Green Development: Collaboration of Universities and Local Actors

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SUSTAINABLE GREEN DEVELOPMENT GUIDEBOOK AND ACTION PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Guidebook

SGD Guide and Action Plan prepared within the scope of the ECOUNITY project focuses on Sustainable Green Development. The guidebook outlines a strategy for collaboration between universities and local stakeholders, including municipalities, NGOs, and businesses, to promote ecological awareness and green practices. The action plan is structured around four major modules:

Image 1. A symbolic illustration of sustainable green development

- Green Economy,
- Sustainable Green Financing and Social Responsibility,
- Green Environment and Agrifood, and
- Sustainable Urban Development and Smart Cities.

The guide emphasises the crucial role of universities in leading these efforts and empowering students as agents of change through practical, project-based activities like conducting audits, organising events, and developing strategies.

Why Universities Must Lead in Sustainable Green Development

Empowering Students as Change Agents

The role of universities includes Empowering Students as Change Agents within the local ecosystem. The guide frames many key activities around student participation and leadership across various domains:

- **Green Economy**

Students are expected to co-lead interactive seminars on green economy principles, collect and analyze data from municipal green projects to measure green growth, and participate in innovation

challenges focusing on green innovation. They can also organize pitch events for local green investors within the scope of local green entrepreneurship.

- **Sustainable Green Financing and Social Responsibility**

Students should take the lead in conducting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) audits for local businesses. They can collaborate with municipal teams on green budgeting proposals and simulate local green bond campaigns.

- **Green Environment and Agrifood**

Students should be guided to volunteer on local sustainable farms or NGOs, focus on sustainable practices, practices focussed on reducing food waste and understand the reasons for financing public policies focussed environment and climate change.

- **Sustainable Urban Development and Smart Cities**

Students should participate in designing labs alongside urban planners and municipal engineers. They can also collaborate on joint assessment reports regarding urban mobility, public transportation, and AI-supported traffic control systems, and facilitate town halls for inclusive and participatory urban planning.

Fostering Collaboration

University leadership is fundamentally tied to Collaboration of Universities and Local Actors. The methodology emphasizes Co-creation & Collaboration using a participatory approach to engage local stakeholders such as Municipalities, NGOs, Companies, and Cooperatives. This structure positions universities as central hubs connecting knowledge, innovation, and practical implementation within the local community for SGD.

Empowering Students as Change Agents

Universities play a crucial role in not only imparting knowledge to students, but also empowering them to bring about sustainable change in their communities. Focus group discussions revealed that students are very aware of environmental threats such as climate change, pollution and overconsumption of resources, but feel that their practical knowledge and influence is limited. They stated that they prefer practical decision-making opportunities to purely theoretical learning.

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To meet these needs, EcoUnity introduces activities that combine compulsory and elective elements and encourage students to experiment, lead and make influential decisions.

Examples include:

Compulsory activities: Sustainability audits at partner organisations, simulations of ethical dilemmas in management and structured service-learning assignments at NGOs or communities. These tasks embed the topic of sustainability in the curriculum and ensure that every student experiences responsibility in practice.

Optional activities: participation in living labs, co-creation of solutions with local stakeholders or involvement in community projects such as waste prevention campaigns, energy transition planning or green tourism initiatives. Students can also earn credits or certificates for working with NGOs, which has been emphasised as a motivating factor in student surveys.

Through these activities, students move from being passive learners to decision-makers and innovators. They become responsible for proposing and defending sustainability strategies, negotiating with stakeholders and balancing social, financial and environmental trade-offs. In this way, they not only acquire professional skills, but also strengthen their civic identity as agents of change committed to a sustainable future.

Role of Local Stakeholders (Municipalities, NGOs, Companies, Cooperatives)

The role of the local actors should be actively collaborating with universities and students across various domains of Sustainable Green Development (SGD):

1. Municipalities and Public Institutions

Municipalities and public institutions are deeply integrated into planning, financing, and implementing local green policy:

- **Green Budgeting**

  They can work alongside students on proposed green expenditures as part of public institution and green budgeting efforts,.

- **Urban Planning and Infrastructure:**

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Urban planners and municipal engineers can participate in design labs with students for sustainable urban design. Furthermore, city transport units can collaborate with students on joint assessment reports concerning AI-supported traffic control systems and urban mobility.

- **Measuring Green Growth**

  They can provide the data foundation necessary for students to collect and analyze real data from municipal green projects to measure green growth.

2. Companies and Local Businesses

Local businesses should be positioned as partners in innovation, investment, and ethical practices:

- **Green Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

  Local business representatives can co-lead interactive seminars on green economy principles with students. Local entrepreneurs can also offer mentorship for student-led innovation challenges.

- **Investment**

  Local green investors can participate when student incubators organize pitch events for local green entrepreneurship.

- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**

  They are expected to be the focus of environmental scrutiny, receiving results from CSR audits conducted by student groups.

3. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs should be supported in their crucial role of securing funding for local environmental initiatives:

- **Funding Strategies**

  They can engage in Co-creation workshops where students assist NGOs in developing necessary fundraising strategies for local green projects.

4. Cooperatives (Farmer Cooperatives)

Cooperatives are vital actors in the Green Environment and Agrifood sector:

- **Climate-Smart Agriculture**

  Farmer cooperatives can organize joint projects with students focused on agroecology and climate adaptation, specifically in the area of climate-smart agriculture.

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GREEN ECONOMY

Purpose and Rationale of the Module

Image 2. A symbolic illustration of Green Economy

The Green Economy module within the Sustainable Green Development (SGD) Guide is designed to strengthen universities' role as local transformation hubs and to equip students with the practical decision-making literacy required for sustainable change at the local level. Focus group discussions conducted with students (FGI, 31.12.2024), local actors including NGOs and public institutions (FGI, 31.03.2025), and university representatives (FGI, 2025) converge on a clear diagnosis: while awareness of environmental threats is relatively high, the pathways that translate awareness into structured, sustained, and measurable action remain weak, fragmented, and often ad hoc.

Students express a strong preference for hands-on, project-based learning and repeatedly emphasise that they do not hear about existing sustainability activities due to insufficient promotion and limited visibility of NGOs on campus. Local NGOs and civic actors show strong willingness to collaborate—especially to access academic knowledge, evidence-based reporting, and student volunteering—yet they face bureaucratic hurdles, unclear contact points, and communication gaps that prevent collaboration from becoming routine and predictable. University representatives underline that collaboration mechanisms do exist (student clubs, volunteering courses, internships, coordinator units such as sustainability/green transformation coordination's), but they are unevenly utilised, underfunded in terms of basic logistics, and burdened by legal uncertainties, operational delays, and the responsibility load placed on academic advisors.

Against this background, the Green Economy module positions the university as the central connector between knowledge, innovation, and implementation in the local ecosystem. It aims to:

- transform students' awareness and everyday pro-environmental habits into actionable skills,

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- reduce the transaction costs of collaboration (communication, bureaucracy, coordination),
- embed local needs in teaching through structured mechanisms and predictable participation routes, and
- generate measurable value for local stakeholders through evidence, reporting, and continuity.

In short, this module shifts students from being passive learners to becoming capable contributors who can analyse local sustainability challenges, justify trade-offs, communicate evidence, and co-develop solutions with municipalities, NGOs, and businesses.

1. Key Findings from the Focus Groups

a) Students

- **Low awareness and visibility**

  Students report minimal knowledge of NGO activities on campus and limited awareness of sustainability initiatives beyond occasional club events.

- **Preference for practical projects**

  Students want practical projects addressing local priorities such as waste management, air pollution, stray animals, and place-based environmental challenges (e.g., the Kaz Mountains).

- **Benefits valued**

  NGO involvement is seen as improving confidence, communication, teamwork, and a sense of contribution to society; however, opportunities are scarce.

- **Barriers**

  Inadequate promotion, weak university–NGO collaboration, trust issues, limited activities, and unfamiliarity with NGOs.

b) Local Actors

- **High willingness to collaborate**

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NGOs and civic actors strongly want to collaborate with universities, particularly for academic support (reports, evidence, legal/scientific grounding) and student volunteers.

- **Limited current collaboration**

  Cooperation is minimal or protocol-based in a few cases; many NGOs report no systematic engagement with the university.

- **Barriers**

  Bureaucracy, unclear communication channels, contact point problems, occasional academic reluctance, and logistical constraints (time/travel).

- **Future direction**

  Strong demand for a dedicated university–NGO liaison/networking unit and more predictable collaboration routines.

c) University Representatives

- **Existing mechanisms but fragmented**

  Student clubs, volunteering courses, internships and coordinator units enable cooperation but are not systematically coordinated.

- **Benefits**

  Employability, curriculum enrichment, strengthened university–community ties, local economic impact via knowledge/R&D transfer, and institutional gains (visibility, quality/accreditation metrics).

- **Barriers**

  Lack of micro-level logistical support (e.g., transport), bureaucratic/legal complexity, reporting/accounting delays, low civil society literacy, and heavy responsibility burdens on academic advisors.

- **Needed improvements**

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Needs-based project design, systematic documentation/reporting, clearer partner selection criteria (transparency, accountability, mission alignment), and pilot-first collaboration when necessary.

These findings justify a Green Economy module that focuses not only on environmental awareness, but also on decision-making, institutional mechanisms, and continuity.

Understanding Green Economy Principles

As a result of the data collected in the partner universities, the students considered environmental pollution, global warming and climate change the greatest threats to current and future generations. However, the majority rated their knowledge of environmental protection as insufficient.

Among students, the most common environmental activities are waste separation, second-hand shopping and participation in pro-environmental initiatives that help shape environmentally friendly habits. Many students try to reduce their use of plastic and water. They have also noticed the importance of environmental education from an early age through participation in initiatives such as collecting plastic caps or wastepaper, which foster the development of pro-environmental habits and increase ecological awareness.

Hence, it is crucial that universities lead in Sustainable Green Development to address the acknowledged gap between students' high awareness of major threats (environmental pollution, global warming, and climate change) and their insufficient knowledge of environmental protection.

The findings emphasize the need to transform students' existing pro-environmental habits (such as waste separation, second-hand shopping, and reducing plastic/water use) into comprehensive, actionable skills by implementing structured educational and practical initiatives outlined in the guide's Action Plan Modules.

Focus groups show that this gap is not limited to environmental knowledge; it is also about access, participation routes, and institutionalisation of practice. Students repeatedly reported that even

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when activities occur, they often do not hear about them—resulting in low participation. In parallel, local actors expressed strong willingness to collaborate but described persistent barriers such as unclear contact points, communication gaps, and bureaucratic delays. Together, these perspectives suggest that universities must not only deliver sustainability content, but also create visible, inclusive, and predictable entry points for students to engage with local stakeholders.

Therefore, in this guide the Green Economy principles are taught not merely as abstract environmental concepts, but as a practical framework for local-level decision-making: students learn how green choices are shaped by scarcity, trade-offs, incentives, accountability, and institutional capacity. This approach enables students to understand why local sustainability action often fails (high transaction costs, weak coordination, low trust, limited continuity) and how it can succeed (structured mechanisms, evidence-based reporting, clear roles, and measurable outcomes).

Measuring Green Growth

Students can collect real data from municipal green projects by first understanding the goals and scope of the initiative, such as improving air quality, increasing green space, or promoting sustainable transport. They may gather primary data through field observations, surveys with residents, simple environmental measurements, or interviews with municipal staff, while also using secondary data from municipal open data portals, sustainability reports, or environmental agencies. Once collected, the data should be carefully organised in spreadsheets, checked for errors, and prepared for analysis so that it accurately reflects real conditions in the project area.

After organising the data, students analyse it by identifying patterns, comparing results before and after the project, and linking findings to their original research questions. Quantitative data can be analysed using basic calculations and visualised with charts, while qualitative data can be examined by grouping similar responses and identifying recurring themes. Students then interpret what the results say about the effectiveness and impact of the municipal green project, considering limitations such as time, data availability, or external factors, and reflect on how real-world data analysis contributes to understanding sustainability and civic engagement.

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Local actors strongly emphasised that academic evidence increases legitimacy and impact. NGOs highlighted that academic reports and publications help provide scientific and legal grounding for environmental initiatives, while student volunteers strengthen organisational capacity. This indicates that "measuring green growth" should be treated not only as a classroom exercise but also as a tool for local governance, accountability, and community problem-solving.

1. **Practical Implementation Steps (Suggested Template for Lecturers)**

- **Start with needs-based framing**

  Define a shared research question with a municipal unit or NGO (e.g., "Has a waste separation initiative improved sorting behaviour in neighbourhood X?").

- **Use a simple data plan**

  What data will be collected, by whom, when, with what tools, and what quality checks will be applied?

- **Collect mixed evidence**

  Combine basic quantitative measures (counts, simple indicators) with qualitative feedback (short interviews, surveys).

- **Analyse and visualise**

  Use spreadsheets, basic calculations, and simple charts for quantitative results; categorise and theme qualitative findings.

- **Produce a "Green Growth Brief" (2–3 pages)**

  Present key findings, limitations, and feasible recommendations in accessible language.

- **Ensure visibility and continuity**

  Share outputs through an official channel (faculty website, coordinator unit, liaison platform) and store them in a simple archive to build institutional memory.

2. **What to measure (minimum indicator logic):**

- Environmental indicators (project-specific: waste diversion, air quality proxies, green space usage, mobility patterns)
- Participation indicators (students involved, partners engaged, hours contributed)
- Output indicators (briefs, datasets, infographics, public presentations)

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- Follow-up indicators (repeatability)
- Stakeholder uptake, (next steps identified)

University–Business Cooperation for Green Innovation

According to the data collected, students consider education for sustainable development important, although some have limited awareness of the topic, which leads to a shallow approach. Most appreciates university programs on sustainable development, but some remains indifferent. There is also a desire to learn more about the role of NGOs in this area and to interact with them as part of the courses. Students indicate that collaboration with NGOs should be practical, flexible, tailored to their needs, and involve attractive benefits such as certificates or gadgets. The idea of earning ECTS credits for participating in NGO activities is very popular, as concrete benefits can increase the motivation to get involved.

University representatives stressed that collaboration with external stakeholders often relies on student clubs, volunteering courses, internships, and coordinator units, but these mechanisms are frequently fragmented and underutilised. This means that "cooperation for green innovation" should be guided by a clear pathway that links student participation to institutional mechanisms and stakeholder needs—reducing reliance on ad hoc, individual-driven arrangements.

From a green economy perspective, cooperation is not only a social responsibility; it is also a local value creation strategy. University representatives noted that effective collaboration enhances employability, contributes to local R&D capacity, strengthens university–community ties, and can improve institutional visibility and quality metrics. Local actors likewise highlighted that student volunteering and academic expertise can significantly increase their project capacity and credibility.

1. Reducing transaction costs and managing risk:

Both local actors and university representatives identified barriers that are best understood as transaction costs: weak communication channels, bureaucratic procedures, legal uncertainties (student participation and safety), reporting/accounting delays, and the heavy responsibility burden

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placed on academic advisors. The guide therefore recommends that lecturers and institutions use standardised templates, clear roles, and predictable mechanisms (internships, volunteering courses, structured club projects) to reduce uncertainty and enhance continuity.

2. Practical guidance for lecturers:

- Prioritise formal mechanisms (internships, volunteering course assignments, coordinator-supported projects) to reduce delays and reliance on personal networks.
- Apply minimum partner criteria (transparency, accountability, mission alignment) to reduce trust and reputational risks.
- Use pilot-first collaborations for new partners before scaling activities.
- Recognise student participation through certificates, ECTS-linked outputs (where possible), and "social transcript" documentation to respond to student motivation patterns.

Local Green Entrepreneurship

Student incubators can successfully organise pitch events with local green investors by first clearly defining the purpose and focus of the event, such as supporting climate innovation, circular economy solutions, or sustainable mobility. The incubator should identify and invite investors, impact funds, municipal representatives, and green business leaders whose interests align with student-led projects, while also setting clear criteria for participating teams and providing them with guidance on what investors expect. Early planning is essential and should include choosing an accessible venue, setting a realistic timeline, promoting the event through universities and local networks, and ensuring that students receive mentoring or pitch training in advance so they can present their ideas with confidence and clarity.

During and after the pitch event, the incubator should create an environment that encourages constructive dialogue and long-term collaboration rather than only competition. This includes structuring the agenda to allow time for pitches, feedback, and networking, as well as using transparent evaluation criteria focused on impact, feasibility, and scalability. After the event, follow-up is crucial: students should receive written feedback, introductions to interested investors, and

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information about next steps such as pilot projects, acceleration programmes, or funding opportunities. By maintaining relationships with both investors and student teams, the incubator can turn a single pitch event into an ongoing platform for green innovation and local sustainability impact.

Focus groups suggest that entrepreneurship activities can serve broader local sustainability needs when designed as multi-actor platforms. Local NGOs expressed strong interest in joint projects addressing local environmental problems but also highlighted funding and logistical constraints. Students requested practical projects that solve visible local problems. University representatives emphasised the importance of needs-based design and systematic follow-up to avoid one-off events.

Therefore, pitch events can be broadened to include not only start-up ideas, but also community-based green solutions co-developed with municipalities and NGOs. For example, municipalities/NGOs can provide "problem briefs" (e.g., waste prevention, awareness campaigns, campus sustainability, local biodiversity, animal welfare, post-disaster recovery), and student teams can propose feasible solutions, partnerships, and implementation plans.

1. Visibility and trust as part of design:

Students consistently identified insufficient promotion as a major barrier. Accordingly, pitch events should integrate a communication plan: pre-event outreach through official university channels and social media, clear entry points for newcomers, and post-event sharing of outcomes. Tangible incentives (certificates, recognition, ECTS-linked participation where possible) align with student motivations and increase sustained engagement.

2. Follow-up and continuity template:

- Written feedback to teams within two weeks
- One follow-up meeting with interested stakeholders
- A simple project tracker (partners, next steps, timeline)
- A designated contact person (liaison/coordinator)
- One public "impact note" summarising outcomes and learning

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Teaching Guidelines: Compulsory and Optional Activities

1. Embedding Green Economy in Teaching

- **Core concepts with local relevance**

  Teach green economy as decision-making under scarcity (public goods, externalities, incentives, equity) rather than only awareness.

- **Local case anchoring**

  Use short local cases (Kaz Mountains, municipal waste systems, Biga air pollution, campus sustainability).

- **Cross-module bridges**

  Connect the Green Economy module to green financing (budgeting and incentives), urban development (mobility), and agrifood (waste), so this module becomes a foundation for the entire guide.

2. Compulsory Activities

- **Green Economy Decision Lab (Trade-off Simulation)**

  Students allocate limited resources across competing sustainability priorities and justify trade-offs to peers and invited stakeholders.

- **Local Green Economy Brief (2–3 pages)**

  Student teams produce a brief combining a local problem statement, basic data, stakeholder mapping, and feasible options.

- **Green Growth Data Task**

  Students collect and analyse real data from a municipal/campus micro-project and produce simple charts and interpretations.

3. Optional Activities

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- **University–NGO Co-creation Studio**

  Students co-design campaigns, project proposals, simple budgets, and citizen-facing materials with NGOs.

- **Living Lab participation**

  Students join labs with municipal engineers/planners for pilots (waste prevention, mobility surveys, recycling points).

- **Student-led mini conference or public forum**

  Students organise an event and produce a summary report with follow-up actions.

4. Making Participation Predictable and Trusted

- **Visibility protocol**

  Every activity should include a short outreach plan (official channels + social media + clear newcomer entry points).

- **Partner selection and trust**

  Apply minimum criteria (transparency, accountability, mission alignment) and pilot-first collaboration for new partners.

- **Risk and responsibility sharing**

  Use standardised consent/safety procedures, templates, and co-advising models to reduce the responsibility burden on academics.

Action Plan for Lecturers

1. Short-term

- Integrate 1–2 local green economy cases into existing courses.
- Run one Decision Lab simulation.
- Pilot the Green Growth Data Task using a campus/community micro-project.

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- Host one stakeholder session (NGO/municipality representative as discussant).
- Publish outputs via official channels to address low visibility.

2. Medium-term

- Institutionalise the Local Green Economy Brief as a recurring course assignment.
- Build a small pool of trusted partners with clear criteria and a single contact point.
- Link volunteering courses and internships explicitly to Green Economy outputs and reporting templates.
- Create a basic reporting routine and archive to prevent institutional memory loss.

3. Long-term

- Establish a university–local actor collaboration platform (liaison office + online portal).
- Develop micro-credentials/certificates in Green Economy Decision-Making & Local Data Literacy.
- Scale living labs and co-creation studios into multi-semester formats with measurable community impact.

Barriers and Practical Mitigation

- **Low visibility / weak promotion**

  Assign a communication lead in each team; publish via official channels; use social media toolkits.

- **Bureaucratic/legal uncertainty**

  Standard consent, travel, and safety templates; clarify participation procedures early.

- **Logistical funding gaps**

  Micro-budgets for transport; local sponsorships; start with nearby pilot sites.

- **Trust and partner mismatch**

  Minimum partner criteria + pilot-first approach.

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- **Academic responsibility burden**

  Co-advising, standard templates, limited scope per semester, and shared supervision.

Expected Outputs and Indicators

1. Expected Outputs (examples):

- Local Green Economy Briefs (policy-style documents)
- Green Growth datasets and simple dashboards
- Public-facing infographics/posters/reels (awareness outputs)
- Event summaries and stakeholder feedback notes
- Student reflection notes (individual learning accountability)

2. Minimum Indicators:

- Number of students participating; hours contributed
- Number/type of partners engaged (NGOs, municipality units, businesses)
- Number of outputs produced (briefs, datasets, campaigns)
- Evidence of follow-up (next meetings, pilot plans, adoption interest)
- Student skill development (self-reported confidence, teamwork, communication)

The Green Economy module underscores the role of lecturers as facilitators of engaged learning and universities as local transformation hubs. By embedding green economy principles into teaching, implementing compulsory and optional hands-on activities, and reducing collaboration barriers through clear mechanisms and reporting routines, universities can turn student awareness into sustained local impact. This approach responds directly to the needs expressed by students and local actors: a credible, evidence-based pathway for shaping SGD in the local ecosystem.

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SUSTAINABLE GREEN FINANCING AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Ethics

Image 3. A symbolic illustration addressing corporate social responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental Ethics are increasingly central to business education and to the broader mission of universities as socially responsible institutions. Findings from focus groups with university representatives, local actors, and students (EcoUnity Project, 2024–25) highlight both opportunities and challenges: students value hands-on learning and want deeper integration of sustainability across curricula; local actors welcome collaboration but call for more structured partnerships; and universities acknowledge the benefits of engagement but often operate through fragmented initiatives.

This Action Guide translates these insights into practical recommendations for lecturers who wish to prepare students as future decision-makers in sustainable finance, responsible management, and community engagement.

1. Key Findings from The Focus Groups

a) Students (FGI, 2024)

- Low awareness of university sustainability initiatives; desire for better integration into curricula.
- Strong interest in internships, NGO collaboration, and project-based learning.
- Emphasized practical activities linking theory to real social and environmental impact.

b) Local Actors (FGI, 2025)

- NGOs and municipalities often serve as hosts for student practice, offering real-world CSR and environmental engagement.
- Collaboration provides mutual benefits: students gain skills and NGOs gain expertise and capacity.
- Barriers: ad hoc cooperation, lack of institutional frameworks, limited continuity in student involvement.
- Desired future: structured partnerships, service-learning models, multi-semester internships, and co-designed curricula.

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c) University Representatives (FGI, 2025)

- Wide range of successful collaborations exist (EU projects, community initiatives, RIMAP platform).
- Benefits: employability, curriculum enrichment, interdisciplinary research, and societal relevance.
- Barriers: fragmented initiatives, lack of institutional mechanisms, regulatory complexity.
- Future priorities: green economy, healthy cities, and green agriculture; less emphasis on smart cities and sustainable finance.

2. Teaching Guidelines for CSR & Environmental Ethics in terms of focus group results can be observed in next main student-teaching areas:

a) Embedding Sustainability in Teaching

- Mandatory components: Introduce CSR and environmental ethics as core topics in business and finance courses. Use case studies on ESG investing, regenerative economics, and circular economy.
- Elective modules: Offer applied workshops or projects with NGOs, municipalities, or businesses on sustainability challenges.
- Cross-disciplinary integration: Link sustainability to accounting, finance, marketing, and policy to avoid treating it as isolated.

b) Hands-on, Student-Centered Activities

- Decision-making simulations: Role-play exercises where students act as managers making ethical trade-offs.
- Sustainability audits: Assign students to assess and report on partner organizations' CSR practices.
- Service-learning: Combine coursework with volunteering or community-based projects.
- Elective "living lab" projects: Students co-create solutions with municipalities or NGOs on real issues.

c) Fostering Student Agency

- Encourage students to design their own CSR initiatives.
- Use reflection journals and peer discussions to develop ethical awareness.
- Position students as decision-makers rather than passive learners.

3. Next crucial step is building collaboration with local actors through:

- Structured partnerships: Develop Memoranda of Understanding with NGOs and municipalities.

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- Guest lecturers and mentors: Invite practitioners to provide insights on sustainability finance or NGO advocacy.
- Joint research and action projects: Involve students in applied research that informs local strategies.
- Multi-semester internships: Engage students in long-term NGO or municipal projects.
- Co-design curricula: Collaborate with NGOs to design elective courses on civic engagement, environmental activism, or innovation.

4. Action Plan for Lecturers can be presented in time dependent periods as follows:

a) Short-term (next semester)

- Introduce CSR case studies and ethical dilemmas in existing courses.
- Organize 1–2 guest lectures with local NGO or business representatives.
- Pilot decision-making simulations in class.

b) Medium-term (1–2 years)

- Establish mandatory service-learning assignments for selected courses.
- Offer elective modules with hands-on NGO/municipality collaboration.
- Develop student-led sustainability audits and reports on partner organizations.
- Create mentoring networks linking students with practitioners.

c) Long-term (3+ years)

- Institutionalize NGO and municipal partnerships through formal agreements.
- Co-develop interdisciplinary curricula and micro-credentials in CSR, ESG finance, and environmental ethics.
- Build a university-wide “living lab” model for sustainability solutions.
- Promote student advocacy roles in shaping local sustainability policies.

The Action Guide in this part of CSR and Environmental ethics underscores the role of lecturers as facilitators of engaged, ethical learning. By embedding CSR and environmental ethics into teaching, offering mandatory and elective hands-on activities, and collaborating closely with local actors, lecturers can transform students into active decision-makers. In doing so, universities move beyond theory to foster real-world impact — preparing graduates to lead in sustainable finance, responsible management, and socially conscious innovation.

Public Institutions and Green Budgeting

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Public institutions, through their budgeting processes, have a decisive influence on whether development pathways are sustainable. Green budgeting is a tool that integrates environmental considerations into public finance, ensuring that public resources are used to foster ecological sustainability, resilience, and social well-being. In this process, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) act as critical partners: they raise awareness, provide expertise on local needs, and hold institutions accountable for implementing sustainability goals. Collaboration between public institutions, NGOs, and universities therefore creates a strong framework for embedding green priorities into both policy and practice.

For students of economics and management, this topic offers a valuable opportunity to connect theoretical knowledge with practical community challenges. To design effective teaching activities, we drew on insights from focus groups conducted within the Ecounity project during 2024 and 2025. The purpose of the focus groups was to gain deeper insight into the perspectives of students, university administration, and local stakeholders regarding practices, opportunities, and barriers to collaboration between the university and the local community in the field of sustainable green development. Students highlighted several barriers: lack of information about NGOs and institutional initiatives, limited time due to work-study balance, and insufficient practical engagement during courses. At the same time, they expressed a strong desire for more project-based learning, real-life case studies, and collaboration with local actors. They prefer interactive assignments over traditional seminars, and they see value in activities that build soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and critical thinking.

In response to the insights gathered, the proposed compulsory and optional activities are designed to actively engage students in line with their expressed needs. By positioning them as decision-makers and connecting them with public institutions, NGOs, and local stakeholders, the activities aim to transform learning into hands-on experience. This approach reflects students' wish for more practical, interactive, and community-oriented forms of education.

Reflecting the needs expressed by students, the following activities provide examples of compulsory and optional ways of engagement.

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1. Compulsory Activities

a) Green Budget Simulation Exercise

Responding to students' wish for practical, problem-solving assignments, this activity simulates the preparation of a municipal budget with sustainability goals. Students allocate limited resources across competing needs (transport, waste, renewable energy, social services), negotiate trade-offs, and present their proposed budget to peers and invited local stakeholders. This directly addresses their call for "learning by doing" rather than traditional seminars.

b) Case Study of Local Public Institutions

Students analyze the budget of a chosen public institution (municipality, public utility, cultural institution) and assess how sustainability principles are integrated or neglected. Building on student feedback that real-world examples are more memorable than theory, this task connects classroom learning with the local community. Teams prepare policy briefs with recommendations for more effective integration of green budgeting.

c) Stakeholder Dialogue Workshop

Reflecting students' emphasis on interaction and soft skill development, this workshop brings together representatives from local government, NGOs, and community groups. Students act as "policy advisors" who propose green budget measures, defend their choices, and practice negotiation. This addresses the identified need to strengthen communication, teamwork, and critical thinking.

2. Optional Activities

a) NGO Collaboration Project

Students noted that they often lack knowledge of NGOs, yet they recognize the value of cooperation. In this activity, they partner with a local NGO to prepare funding applications, impact assessments, or communication strategies tied to public financing. This builds networks and exposes students to authentic community challenges.

b) Green Audit of Campus or Community

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Responding to students' concern that sustainability should be visible and tangible, volunteer teams conduct audits of university or municipal practices (waste separation, energy efficiency, procurement). They then suggest "green budget lines" to support improvements.

c) Awareness Campaign Design

Since students pointed out the influence of social media and communication on their generation, this activity invites them to design campaigns that explain green budgeting and sustainable spending to peers and citizens. Outputs may include infographics, reels, or posters, with the best campaigns disseminated through faculty and community channels.

d) Student-Led Mini Conference

For highly motivated students, organizing a one-day conference with experts from public finance, NGOs, and local government offers a platform to connect theory with practice. This activity reflects their interest in direct contact with practitioners and provides leadership experience.

The proposed compulsory and optional activities show that sustainable green development can be effectively taught when students are placed in active, decision-making roles. These activities can be embedded into existing teaching formats: for example, compulsory tasks such as *green budget simulations* or *institutional case studies* can be carried out as structured seminar assignments, while *stakeholder dialogues* can be organized as part of guest lecture sessions. Optional activities, such as *campus green audits* or *NGO collaboration projects*, can be offered as project-based group work or extracurricular workshops for motivated students. With guidance from faculty and continuous cooperation with NGOs and public institutions, these approaches ensure that students acquire practical skills while simultaneously contributing visible value to their local communities and advancing social and green development.

Green Bonds and Sustainable Investments

Green bonds and sustainable investments are practical instruments through which students can learn how finance supports ecological and social change. Within EcoUnity, they are used as learning tools that allow student teams to simulate local green bond campaigns with input from stakeholders such

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as municipalities, NGOs, companies and citizens. The aim is to connect finance with responsibility and to position students as active decision-makers.

Focus groups showed that students are motivated by practical and creative tasks, while at the same time they are aware of real barriers. They pointed out that sustainable products and solutions are often more expensive and therefore harder to access. They also expressed doubts about the credibility of companies that sometimes use sustainability only as a marketing tool or even practice greenwashing, while NGOs were often seen as more trustworthy but financially weaker. Many students said that they prefer learning through projects rather than repetitive lectures. This makes bond simulations an ideal method to meet their needs.

In these simulations, student teams create a full campaign for a local green bond, step by step. They are guided to:

- identify a concrete project that would benefit the community, such as renewable energy installations, public transport improvements, sustainable agriculture, or eco-tourism,
- form mixed groups where each student plays a role (issuer, NGO evaluator, investor, citizen representative),
- design the financial structure of the bond, including size, maturity, interest rate, and use of proceeds,
- prepare communication materials such as presentations, campaign brochures, and investor briefings,
- organize a simulated roadshow where they present the project to stakeholders and answer critical questions,
- include stakeholder input to refine the project, for example feedback from NGOs on ecological credibility or from municipalities on budget feasibility,
- measure expected outcomes, such as reduced emissions, energy savings, or local job creation,
- report transparently on risks, costs, and long-term benefits to ensure accountability.

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Through this process, students practice soft skills that they themselves highlighted as essential: teamwork, communication, problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity. The activity requires negotiation, defense of positions, and finding compromises between different interests. It also encourages them to reflect on ethical dilemmas, for example whether to support a low-risk project with limited impact or a high-risk project with potentially transformative results.

To expand the scope, students may also explore other sustainable finance models such as impact investing, blended finance or crowdfunding. However, the core exercise remains the green bond simulation because it provides a structured and realistic way to balance finance with sustainability.

Teaching guidelines to support these simulations include:

- start with a short introduction to the mechanics of green bonds and the principles of transparency and accountability (e.g. EU taxonomy, Green Bond Principles),
- make every student participate in at least one role, while elective tasks can allow deeper exploration of chosen areas,
- invite guest stakeholders (NGO representatives, municipal officials, local entrepreneurs) to act as external evaluators or mentors,
- simulate barriers such as high costs or risks of greenwashing and challenge students to respond with concrete solutions,
- require both group presentations and individual reflections to ensure accountability,
- link projects to the local context, for example by designing bonds for the city, university campus, or regional initiatives,
- use peer review so students also evaluate each other's campaigns, learning from different approaches,
- conclude with a session where students reflect on how finance can be both a risk and an opportunity for sustainability.

The simulation exercise shows students that finance is not neutral. Their decisions in structuring and promoting a green bond determine whether capital supports genuine ecological and social

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change or is wasted on symbolic gestures. By practicing this process, they learn how to connect financial logic with community needs and environmental priorities.

The ultimate goal is to empower students to see themselves as financial decision-makers. They experience how to design a sustainable investment, defend it in front of critical audiences, and integrate stakeholder input into final outcomes. For universities, this model represents a way to prepare graduates who understand both finance and sustainability, and who can lead future campaigns for green investments in their professional and civic lives.

Funding Mechanisms for Local Green Projects

Local green projects, ranging from community gardens and recycling efforts to renewable energy demonstration facilities and environmental education campaigns, are vital instruments for local-level response to environmental sustainability. Their use, however, is frequently thwarted by a single challenge: securing sustainable financing. Universities, NGOs, and local stakeholders increasingly recognize the benefits of engaging students in both the conception and financing of such activities. Evidence from student focus groups and questionnaires conducted during the ECOUNITY project provides valuable recommendations for the design of future funding models. Such evidence suggests that not only are students engaged with the environment, but they are also strongly motivated to play active roles in designing fundraising campaigns and acting as decision-makers when resources are allocated.

Student interviews reveal a range of themes in common. Students widely participate in small-scale sustainable behavior in everyday life, e.g., recycling, reducing food waste, using public transport, but perceive the structural barriers to stepped-up action. Many students reported the contradiction that environmentally-friendly products and services tend to be more expensive, making them less accessible and supporting unsustainable consumption. Fast fashion and consumerism were perceived as major problems, with students acknowledging their generation's guilt but also revealing a willingness to change behavior when given cheaper alternatives. This awareness sets the terms of their opinion on funding local green initiatives: they prefer transparency, affordability, and options that forego pricey "green" brands.

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When asked about the functions of NGOs and companies, there were divided views among students. NGOs were generally seen as more authentic and purpose-driven and could be relied upon to do the public good without intent for profit. While this was happening, students knew that NGOs don't have resources or visibility, while companies have economic clout but are susceptible to greenwash. This tension creates the necessity for hybrid solutions: collaborations in which NGOs bring expertise and legitimacy, firms provide funds, and students bring creativity, communications skills, and local knowledge. Students particularly highlighted that NGOs should become more visible on campuses, as the youth are the future custodians of the sustainability ideas and would benefit from learning from actual implementation. Student-NGO partnership thus becomes a two-way street: NGOs are offered creative input and possible volunteers, while the students are offered soft skills, work experience, and more agency.

In terms of funding arrangements, different models were discussed and appear particularly well-suited to student–NGO co-creation workshops. Public funds remain the central source, in the form of municipal grants, EU structural funds, and national green transition programs. Students reported that administrative sophistication associated with such funds, however, deters smaller NGOs from submitting applications. Students in such instances may assist NGOs by contributing writing proposals, gathering data, or budgeting. Private-sector donations through CSR programs, sponsorships, or local partnerships were also deemed relevant, with students cautioning against superficial "green" tokenism. By becoming critical evaluators, students can help NGOs create partnerships that do not function merely for marketing aims but instead yield concrete environmental impacts. Hybrid models such as community bonds, cooperative lending, or participatory budgeting were especially appealing to students' conception of justice and equity. And then came digital crowdfunding: as a viable and student-friendly means: small amounts of money can be mobilized from large groups, especially if students are responsible for conceiving novel outreach campaigns.

Among the key elements of this approach is the use of co-creation workshops, where the students collaborate directly with NGOs to create fundraising campaigns for real or imaginary projects. Students are placed in the decision-maker's seat in these kinds of workshops: they are given limited resources and asked to allocate them among competing projects, justify their choices, and think

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through trade-offs. This experiential process mirrors actual decision-making and improves critical thinking, negotiation, and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, it provides NGOs with fresh insights into youth attitudes toward credibility, transparency, and effectiveness of fundraising appeals.

The workshops may be supplemented with a sequence of hand-zone exercises that try to provide compulsory and voluntary practical exposure. Compulsory activities may involve initial sessions on NGO funding, case-study analysis of successful local green initiatives, and group exercises on constructing a simple fundraising plan. Optional activities may range from crowdfunding simulations in which students design and give campaigns to creative tasks such as designing awareness videos or composing social media strategies for NGOs. Another optional stream may be participatory budgeting exercises in which students jointly debate and determine how funds are spent over mock or real projects. By crossing open and structured activities, students with different interests and abilities can engage usefully at their own pace but nevertheless achieve the essential learning outcomes.

One great added value of this student-centric approach is the development of soft skills. During focus group interviews, members consistently named communication, teamwork, empathy, organizational skills, and critical thinking as skills they wish to develop. Through working with NGOs on problems of funding, the students learn how to articulate their thoughts, hear diverse perspectives, and negotiate solutions in conditions that mirror actual professional environments. Meanwhile, NGOs draw on student creativity and digital literacy, especially where skills like social media campaigning are crucial for fundraising in this day and age. Universities therefore play to enable, providing the institutional setting as well as scholastic advising to ensure that such collaborations are fruitful and unilateral.

Policy recommendations resulting from this exercise are clear. Firstly, co-creation workshops must be included in university curricula so that students are exposed to NGO funding and project planning. Secondly, funding mechanisms must be diversified with students being actively involved in deciding hybrid and community-based models sensitive to their values of transparency and inclusivity. Third, experiential learning should not only simulate actual issues but also connect students to local green projects in action, whereby their efforts have actual impact. Finally, NGOs and business should understand the value of investment in student partnerships: beyond financial gain, such collaboration

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builds enduring capacity for sustainable development and trains a generation of citizens who can lead the green shift.

In conclusion, the future of financing local green projects lies in the combination of finance innovation with youth. The students are keen on becoming decision-makers, provided they are given the instruments, leverage, and confidence to leave their signatures. Through the incorporation of co-creation workshops, hand-zone exercises, and open-funding processes into university-NGO alliances, not only are we ensuring resources for local sustainability projects but also encouraging youth to become active participants in shaping the green future of their communities.

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GREEN ENVIRONMENT AND AGRIFOOD

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Environmental education and public policies related to agrifood

The survey and focus group revealed that students of economic faculties perceive **environmental education at the university as insufficiently integrated into practical learning and external cooperation.** Cooperation with environmental NGOs, municipalities, and sustainability-oriented organisations is limited in scope and visibility, leading students to view environmental and climate topics as marginal within university–practice engagement.

Image 5. A symbolic illustration addressing agrifood and agroecology

A major gap identified is the **imbalance between theoretical background and real-world application.** Although sustainability, climate change, and environmental protection are addressed in selected courses, students report a lack of hands-on activities, case-based learning, and structured cooperation focused on environmental problem-solving. When sustainability appears in external collaborations, it is often framed narrowly through ESG reporting or regulatory compliance, rather than through substantive environmental impact or ecological innovation.

Students also highlighted **insufficient cross-disciplinary integration of environmental topics**. Sustainability challenges are not consistently presented as interconnected economic, financial, governance, and social issues, limiting students' ability to understand their systemic nature. Furthermore, environmental learning opportunities are often small-scale, optional, and accessible only to a limited number of students, reducing their overall impact and inclusiveness.

In terms of competencies, students feel **underprepared for emerging career fields such as the green economy, sustainable finance, and green agriculture**. While they are aware of key concepts, they lack practical skills and applied knowledge needed to translate environmental principles into organisational practice. Finally, students noted that universities could play a stronger role as visible

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sustainability leaders by better aligning campus practices with educational objectives. Overall, the findings indicate a need for more systematic, practice-oriented, and interdisciplinary environmental education that clearly links theory, careers, and community impact.

The following activities provide examples of compulsory and optional forms of engagement and help address shortcomings in the current curricula.

Eco-friendly Agricultural Practices: Student Volunteering

To increase students' awareness and understanding of sustainable agriculture and food systems a combination of introductory learning and direct field experience can be used. These activities build foundational knowledge and may be supported by training materials and attendance records. Changes in student knowledge and awareness can be evaluated using pre- and post-workshop questionnaires.

Students can engage in real-life eco-friendly farming practices through volunteering placements on local sustainable farms or NGOs. These farms and NGO apply/promote practices such as organic production, biodiversity-friendly management, water-efficient irrigation, or climate-adapted cropping systems. Over the semester, students document observed practices through structured field reports and photo documentation, linking practical observations to environmental indicators and relevant public policy instruments. The main output of this activity is an improved practical understanding of sustainable farming systems, which is evaluated through student reflection reports and feedback from partner farms.

Local Food Systems and Food Security: Community-Supported Agriculture Initiatives

To promote local food systems and food security, students are tasked with developing and presenting projects related to Community Supported Agriculture initiatives on campus. Throughout the semester, students design CSA event plans in cooperation with local producers, outlining logistics, communication strategies, and participation mechanisms. These plans are accompanied by participation lists and supporting documentation.

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The primary output of this activity is increased visibility of local food systems and enhanced understanding of short food supply chains among students and the wider campus community. Evaluation is based on participation numbers, surveys conducted among participants, and qualitative feedback on awareness and engagement.

To strengthen cooperation between universities and farmer cooperatives while enhancing students' capacity to analyse climate risks and adaptation strategies. During the semester, students work in collaboration with farmer cooperatives on joint projects addressing climate-smart agriculture and agroecological adaptation. These projects focus on real challenges such as water scarcity, soil degradation, yield variability, or biodiversity loss.

Students produce project summaries and recommendations that outline applied agroecological solutions and adaptation options consistent with CAP objectives and EU climate policy. The outputs demonstrate students' ability to integrate scientific knowledge, policy frameworks, and practical constraints. Evaluation is carried out jointly by academic staff and cooperative representatives, ensuring both academic rigor and practical relevance.

Agroecology and Climate Adaptation: Cooperation with Farmers

A central objective of this activity is to strengthen cooperation between universities and farmer cooperatives while enhancing students' capacity to analyse climate risks and adaptation strategies. During the semester, students work in collaboration with farmer cooperatives on joint projects addressing climate-smart agriculture and agroecological adaptation. These projects focus on real challenges such as water scarcity, soil degradation, yield variability, or biodiversity loss.

Students produce project summaries and recommendations that outline applied agroecological solutions and adaptation options consistent with CAP objectives and EU climate policy. Evaluation is carried out jointly by academic staff and cooperative representatives, ensuring both academic rigor and practical relevance.

Waste Reduction and Composting: Circular Economy in Practice

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Waste reduction and circular practices form a key pillar, reflecting the module's focus on food waste and environmental efficiency. During the semester, students focus on innovations and develop composting proposals or implement pilot composting initiatives on campus or in cooperation with local communities. These initiatives are based on an assessment of organic waste streams and are documented through composting plans and monitoring notes.

The expected output is a measurable reduction in organic waste and increased awareness of food waste issues among students and staff. Evaluation relies on observation data, waste monitoring results, and student reflection reports linking practice to EU waste policy and circular economy principles.

Student Leadership, Community Engagement, and Visibility

Across all thematic areas, students work in teams, thereby developing leadership, teamwork, and project management skills. Student teams prepare action plans and final reports documenting their activities and outcomes over the semester. Collaboration with NGOs, farmers and local authorities is encouraged, particularly for agrifood awareness activities that connect environmental learning with broader community impact. These collaborations result in awareness materials and activity reports, and their effectiveness is evaluated through stakeholder feedback.

To increase the visibility of green environment initiatives, the semester concludes with student exhibitions, posters, or short videos presenting agrifood sustainability projects. These visual and communication materials aim to raise campus-wide awareness and disseminate project results beyond the classroom. Evaluation is based on visibility metrics, engagement data, and instructor assessment.

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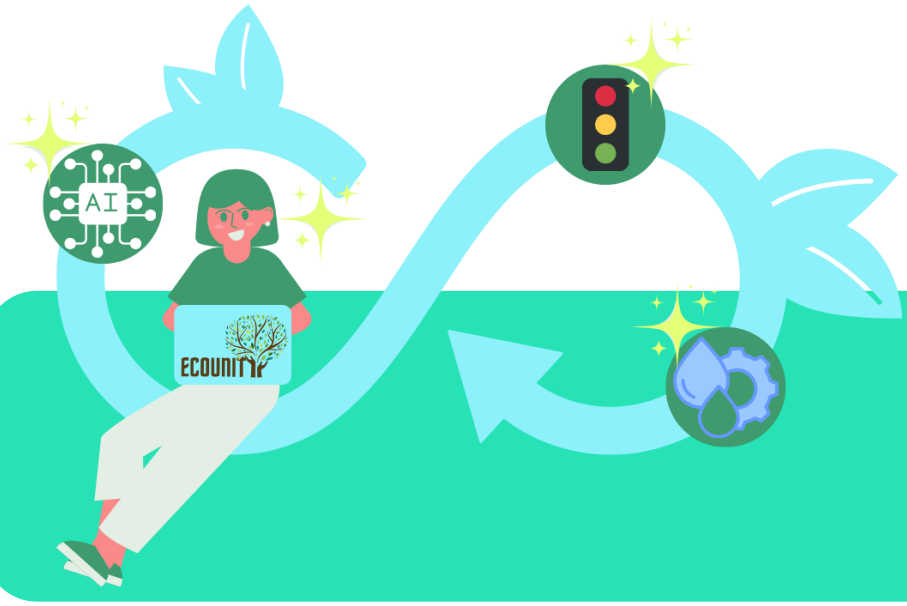

SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND SMART CITIES

Eco-Cities and Smart Urban Design

Image 6. A symbolic illustration of eco-cities

Designing labs with urban planners and municipal engineers allows students to engage directly with real urban challenges while developing practical, interdisciplinary skills. The process should begin with a shared definition of the lab's purpose, where municipalities present concrete problems such as traffic congestion, climate adaptation, public space design, or infrastructure resilience, and educators help translate these challenges into learning objectives.

Early coordination is essential to align academic timelines with municipal planning cycles, define roles and expectations, and ensure access to relevant data, sites, and technical constraints. Students should be introduced to the policy, regulatory, and engineering context of the challenge so they understand real-world limitations alongside creative possibilities.

During the lab, students work in mixed teams using co-design methods, combining spatial analysis, technical feasibility, and user-centred approaches. Activities may include site visits, stakeholder interviews, data analysis, and iterative prototyping, with regular feedback sessions involving planners and engineers to test ideas against professional standards.

The lab should encourage experimentation while grounding proposals in evidence, safety requirements, and budget realities. At the end of the process, students present their solutions in professional formats such as design briefs, technical concept notes, or visualisations that municipalities can realistically use. Reflection and evaluation help students understand how collaboration across disciplines improves urban outcomes and prepares them for future work in public-sector innovation.

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Urban Mobility and Public Transportation

Image 7. A symbolic illustration of public transportation

Students are aware of the impact their transportation choice has on the environment. Most of them prefer to travel by foot or public transportation, rarely using a car, which positively reduces transportation problems. There was also a suggestion to introduce incentives, i.e. a reward system that would motivate young people to use more environmentally friendly means of transport (e.g. bicycles or scooters). They drew attention to the need for local authorities to cooperate with universities to improve the accessibility and comfort of public transport and to reduce its costs for students. The respondents' opinions indicate a high willingness to change transport habits while drawing attention to the need for further action to promote environmentally friendly forms of transport. They also include suggestions regarding the need to improve sustainable transport infrastructure on campus and increase campus environmental activities. The students emphasized that cooperation should combine education with real action to motivate students to act effectively for the environment. Students suggested simplifying procedures, increasing organizational flexibility, and improving communication to improve cooperation.

Based on these findings, a guidance framework focused on sustainable mobility can be developed for students. The main aim of this guidance should be to transform students' existing environmental awareness into concrete actions and long-term habits. Students can be encouraged to reflect on their own transport choices, monitor their travel behaviour, and explore the environmental impact of different modes of transport. Through student initiatives and clubs, they can organise awareness-raising activities such as car-free campus days, cycling campaigns, or shared scooter initiatives that motivate peers to choose more environmentally friendly transport options.

At the same time, guidance should support students in actively cooperating with universities and local authorities. Students can design surveys on public transport accessibility, comfort, and affordability,

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and share the results with decision-makers to advocate for improvements and student-friendly pricing. They can also contribute by preparing proposals to improve sustainable transport infrastructure on campus, such as safe cycling routes, bike parking, or charging points. Emphasising cooperation that combines education with real action, this guidance should encourage flexible procedures, clearer communication, and student participation in decision-making processes, enabling young people to act effectively for the environment.

Inclusive and Participatory Urban Planning

Although many students do not actively engage in additional activities related to sustainable development, they desire to broaden their knowledge about the environment and have a more significant interest in practical activities that allow for direct involvement, such as ecological activities or competitions. They believe these experiences help develop soft skills, such as communication, creativity, and teamwork, which are essential for adequate environmental protection. Collaboration with NGOs provides an excellent opportunity to develop these skills, especially when the activity is engaging and offers real benefits. Interest in working with NGOs increases when the proposals are practical, interactive and tailored to the needs of students, as opposed to the theory taught in lectures. Participation in such activities is associated with a sense of real environmental impact, which increases the motivation to engage in pro-environmental initiatives.

Water management

A poster competition on water management can be organised as an engaging and educational activity by first defining clear objectives and themes, such as water conservation, sustainable urban drainage, wastewater reuse, or the impact of climate change on water resources. Organisers should establish simple and transparent rules regarding poster format, content, and submission deadlines, and clearly communicate the evaluation criteria, which may include scientific accuracy, creativity, clarity of message, and relevance to real-world water challenges. To support students, introductory workshops or short lectures can be offered in collaboration with water experts, municipal services, or environmental organisations so that participants understand local water issues and can base their posters on real data or realistic scenarios.

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The competition should also emphasise learning and visibility rather than only winning. Posters can be exhibited on campus, in public buildings, or online to raise awareness among the wider community, and students can be invited to briefly present their work to a jury composed of academics, water professionals, and local stakeholders. Incentives such as certificates, small prizes, internships, or opportunities to present to local authorities can further motivate participation. After the competition, providing feedback and encouraging discussion helps students reflect on solutions for sustainable water management and strengthens the link between education, creativity, and real environmental action.

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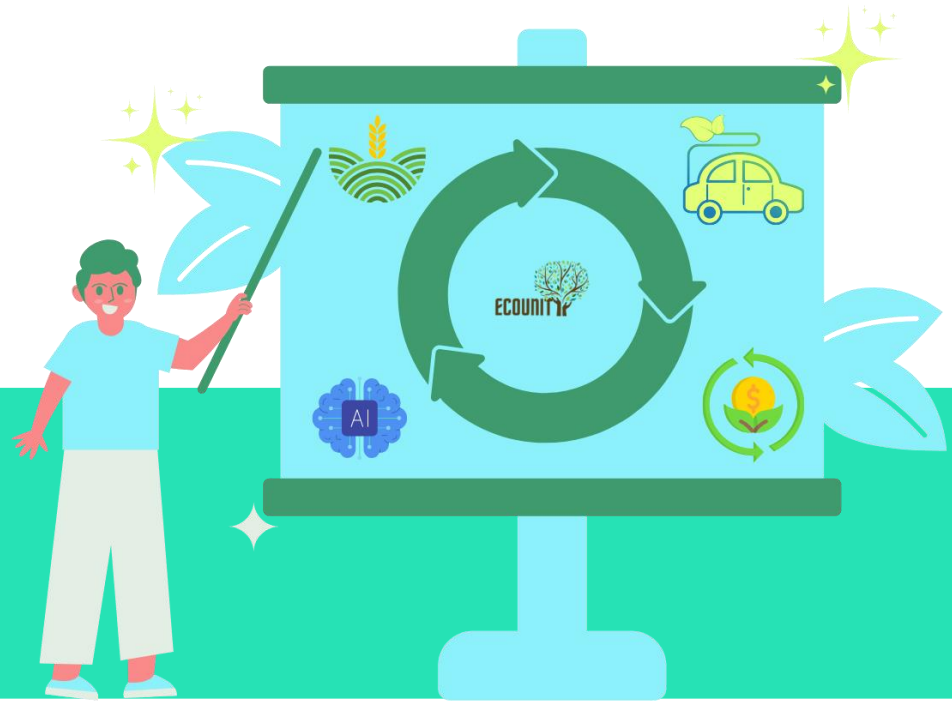

ECOUNITY ACTION PLAN

Module 1 - Green Economy Action Plan

Objectives	Key Activities	Timeline	Deliverables	Outputs	Evaluation Method
Increase students' understanding of green economy principles	Interactive seminars on green economy principles co-led by students and local business representatives	1 semester	Seminar programme and presentation materials	Increased awareness and participation	Pre- and post-seminar questionnaires, participant feedback
Engage students in measuring green growth through real practice	Collection and analysis of real data from municipal green projects (e.g. air quality, green spaces, sustainable transport)	1 semester	Data sets and analytical reports	Green growth assessment reports	Academic evaluation of reports
Strengthen university–municipality cooperation	Joint workshops and data-sharing sessions with municipal representatives	1 semester	Workshop outputs and meeting summaries	Established cooperation practices	Feedback from municipal stakeholders
Develop students' green innovation skills	Student-led green innovation challenges focused on local sustainability problems	1 semester	Project ideas and concept notes	Innovative green solutions	Jury assessment and peer review
Promote local green and social entrepreneurship	Organisation of pitch events by student incubators for local green investors	1 semester	Pitch presentations and mentoring notes	Investor–student connections	Investor feedback and follow-up tracking
Enhance students' decision-making and leadership skills	Role-play exercises and scenario-based simulations on green economy decisions	1 semester	Simulation outputs and reflection reports	Improved decision-making competencies	Self-assessment and instructor evaluation

Increase visibility of green economy activities on campus	Student-created infographics, short videos, and exhibitions on green economy topics	1 semester	Communication and visual materials	Increased campus awareness	Participation rates and visibility metrics
Link academic learning with local impact	Preparation of short policy briefs and recommendations for local actors	1 semester	Policy briefs and recommendations	Contribution to local decision-making	Feedback from local stakeholders

Additional Recommendations to Strengthen the Action Plan for Module 1

To reinforce the impact of Module 1, participation in green economy activities can be recognised through ECTS credits or micro-certificates, which students have identified as a strong motivational factor. Establishing simple data-sharing agreements with municipalities can improve access to reliable information and enhance the quality of student analyses. Successful student projects should be made visible through university, municipal, and local media channels to increase impact and recognition. Finally, organising a student-led “Green Economy Day” at the end of the semester can bring together students, local actors, and the wider community to showcase results, exchange ideas, and strengthen long-term cooperation.

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Module 2 – Social Responsibility and Sustainable Finance Action Plan

Objectives	Key Activities	Timeline	Deliverables	Outputs	Evaluation Method
Increase students' understanding of CSR and environmental ethics	Introduction of CSR and environmental ethics case studies and ethical dilemma discussions in courses	1 semester	Case study materials and discussion notes	Improved conceptual understanding	Pre-/post-course reflections, short quizzes
Develop students' practical skills in CSR analysis	Student-led CSR audits of local businesses or NGOs	1 semester	CSR audit reports	Practical CSR assessments	Academic grading and partner feedback
Strengthen cooperation with NGOs and local actors	Service-learning projects carried out with NGOs or municipalities	1 semester	Project documentation and reflection reports	Strengthened university–community links	NGO and student feedback
Build competencies in green budgeting	Green budget simulation exercises based on local public institutions	1 semester	Simulated green budgets and presentations	Budgeting and decision-making skills	Instructor and peer evaluation
Introduce sustainable finance instruments	Simulated green bond campaigns for local projects	1 semester	Bond design documents and pitch materials	Understanding of green bonds	Jury and stakeholder feedback
Foster student decision-making and ethical reasoning	Role-play exercises involving trade-offs between social, environmental, and financial goals	1 semester	Role-play outputs and reflection notes	Enhanced ethical awareness	Reflection reports and instructor assessment

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Encourage transparent and responsible communication	Student-designed communication materials explaining sustainable finance concepts to the public	1 semester	Infographics, posters, or digital content	Increased awareness of sustainable finance	Visibility metrics and peer review
Promote long-term engagement with sustainability finance	Student mentoring sessions with finance professionals, NGOs, or public-sector experts	1 semester	Mentoring session summaries	Career-oriented sustainability insights	Student feedback surveys

Additional Recommendations to Strengthen the Action Plan for Module 2

To strengthen Module 2, universities can formally recognise student participation through ECTS credits, certificates, or digital badges linked to CSR and sustainable finance competencies. Establishing structured partnerships with NGOs and municipalities through memoranda of understanding can improve continuity and reduce ad hoc cooperation. Guest lecturers from public institutions, ethical finance organisations, and NGOs can be systematically integrated into courses to connect theory with real-world practice. To enhance motivation and visibility, the module can conclude with a student-led showcase or mini-conference where CSR audits, green budget simulations, and green bond projects are presented to local stakeholders. This approach reinforces transparency, practical learning, and students' roles as responsible decision-makers in sustainable finance.

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Module 3 – Green Economy and Agrifood Action Plan

Objectives	Key Activities	Timeline	Deliverables	Outputs	Evaluation Method
Increase students' awareness of sustainable agriculture and food systems	Introductory workshops and lectures on eco-friendly agriculture, agroecology, and food security	1 semester	Training materials and attendance records	Improved knowledge and awareness	Pre-/post-workshop questionnaires
Engage students in real-life eco-friendly farming practices	Student volunteering on local sustainable farms and documentation of practices	1 semester	Field reports and photo documentation	Practical understanding of sustainable farming	Reflection reports and partner feedback
Strengthen cooperation with farmer cooperatives	Joint student–cooperative projects on climate-smart agriculture and adaptation strategies	1 semester	Project summaries and recommendations	Applied agroecology solutions	Evaluation by academic staff and cooperatives
Promote local food systems and food security	Present projects on Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) events on campus	1 semester	CSA event plans and participation lists	Increased visibility of local food systems	Participation numbers and surveys
Reduce waste and promote circular practices	Student-led composting proposals or initiatives on campus or in the community	1 semester	Composting plans and monitoring notes	Reduced organic waste and awareness	Observation data and student reflections
Develop student leadership and teamwork skills	Formation of student teams to manage agrifood projects	1 semester	Team action plans and reports	Enhanced collaboration skills	Peer and instructor assessment

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Connect environmental learning with community impact	Collaboration with NGOs and local authorities on agrifood awareness activities	1 semester	Awareness materials and activity reports	Stronger community engagement	Stakeholder feedback
Increase visibility of green environment initiatives	Student exhibitions, posters, or short videos on agrifood sustainability	1 semester	Visual and communication materials	Campus-wide awareness	Visibility metrics and engagement data

Additional Recommendations to Strengthen the Action Plan for Module 3

To strengthen Module 3, universities can formally recognise student participation through ECTS credits or certificates linked to competencies in sustainable agriculture, agri-environmental management, and agri-food value chains. Establishing structured partnerships with farmers' organisations, agri-food cooperatives, advisory services, environmental NGOs, and local authorities through formal memoranda of understanding can enhance continuity, and policy relevance. Guest lecturers from public administrations, paying agencies, agricultural advisory bodies, and sustainability-oriented agri-food enterprises can be systematically integrated into the curriculum to strengthen the connection between policy frameworks, theoretical concepts, and on-farm implementation. To increase student motivation, knowledge transfer, and external visibility, the module may conclude with a student-led showcase or mini-conference, where sustainability assessments, agri-environment-climate measure simulations, or short food supply chain projects are presented to local and regional stakeholders.

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Module 4 – Sustainable Urban Development and Smart Cities Action Plan

Objectives	Key Activities	Timeline	Deliverables	Outputs	Evaluation Method
Increase students' understanding of sustainable urban development and smart city concepts	Introductory lectures and workshops on eco-cities, smart cities, and sustainable urban planning	1 semester	Training materials and session summaries	Improved conceptual understanding	Pre-/post-session questionnaires
Engage students in real urban challenges through co-design	Design labs organised with urban planners and municipal engineers	1 semester	Design briefs and concept notes	Practice-oriented urban solutions	Expert and instructor evaluation
Promote sustainable urban mobility	Student-led assessments of urban mobility and public transport systems	1 semester	Assessment reports and recommendations	Mobility improvement proposals	Feedback from municipal partners
Encourage environmentally friendly transport behaviour on campus	Awareness campaigns such as car-free campus days, cycling campaigns, or incentive-based initiatives	1 semester	Campaign plans and communication materials	Increased student engagement	Participation rates and surveys
Strengthen participatory and inclusive urban planning	Student-facilitated town halls and stakeholder dialogue meetings	1 semester	Meeting summaries and stakeholder inputs	Inclusive planning experiences	Stakeholder and student feedback

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Raise awareness of sustainable water management	Organisation of a student poster competition on water management topics	1 semester	Posters and exhibition documentation	Increased awareness of water issues	Jury evaluation and audience feedback
Develop students' soft skills and civic engagement	Interdisciplinary teamwork, presentations, and reflection sessions	1 semester	Reflection reports and teamwork outputs	Improved communication and collaboration skills	Self- and peer assessment
Connect academic work with municipal practice	Preparation of short policy briefs or recommendations for local authorities	1 semester	Policy briefs and presentations	Contribution to local decision-making	Feedback from local authorities

Additional Recommendations to Strengthen the Action Plan for Module 4

To enhance Module 4, student participation in urban development and smart city activities can be recognised through ECTS credits, certificates, or digital badges, reinforcing motivation and accountability. Establishing regular collaboration mechanisms with municipalities, such as annual design labs or mobility assessment cycles, can improve continuity and long-term impact. Simplifying administrative procedures and ensuring clear communication channels between students, universities, and local authorities will address barriers identified by students. Finally, concluding the module with a student-led "Sustainable City Forum" can provide a visible platform for presenting design solutions, mobility proposals, and water management ideas, strengthening the link between education, civic engagement, and real urban transformation.

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