

Sustainability self-scan

Exploring sustainability in your course or programme

The Erasmus logo is a stylized, handwritten-style script of the word "Erasmus" in a dark teal color, located in the bottom right corner of the slide.



Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	3
About this self-scan	4
How to use this self-scan	7
SELF-SCAN	8
1. Educating about sustainability	9
1.1 Sustainability challenges	11
1.2 Understanding complexity	13
2. Educating for sustainability	16
2.1 Societal engagement	17
2.2 Reflexivity	20
NEXT STEPS	23



Introduction

Introduction

About this self-scan



INTRODUCTION

About this self-scan

How to use this self-scan

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

2. Educating for sustainability

NEXT STEPS

This sustainability self-scan is a **reflective tool** developed by Erasmus University to support programme directors, academic leaders and teachers in exploring **how sustainability is embedded** in their course or programme.

The self-scan can be used individually or in teams and serves as a basis for a shared discussion on the state of your course or programme regarding sustainability.

The self-scan highlights opportunities to further **strengthen the integration of sustainability** within a course or programme. It is not exhaustive and is intended to be used flexibly, adapted to your educational context. Its primary purpose is to support reflection, (collective) learning and informed action – not evaluation or benchmarking.

Introduction

About this self-scan

By completing this sustainability self-scan, you will gain:

- * A clearer overview of how sustainability is currently embedded in your course or programme.
- * A shared language for discussing sustainability education within your team.
- * Insight into strengths, gaps, and opportunities for further development.
- * Concrete starting points for enhancing learning outcomes, teaching activities, assessment, and collaboration related to sustainability.



INTRODUCTION

About this self-scan

How to use this self-scan

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

2. Educating for sustainability

NEXT STEPS

Introduction

About this self-scan

This self-scan distinguishes between two complementary levels of sustainability education:

1. Educating *about* sustainability
2. Educating *for* sustainability

These levels will be explained on the next pages.

Most courses and programmes combine elements of both. The questions in this self-scan are intended to help you reflect on how these elements, across a range of topics included for each level, are currently balanced and where further development may be possible.



INTRODUCTION

About this self-scan

How to use this self-scan

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

2. Educating for sustainability

NEXT STEPS

Introduction

How to use this self-scan?

For each topic in this scan, we start with a **statement**. We invite you to reflect on this statement and **rate** your course or programme on a 1–5 scale. If used in a team setting, reflect on your scores together and discuss the reasoning behind them. After rating the statement, you can use the **guiding questions** to check your overall conclusion or to explore additional opportunities related to this topic. These questions may lead you to reconsider your initial rating, which is part of the reflective process.



INTRODUCTION

About this self-scan

How to use this self-scan

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

2. Educating for sustainability

NEXT STEPS



Self-scan



Educating *about* sustainability

Educating *about* sustainability focuses on **understanding**.

It addresses whether students gain knowledge of sustainability concepts, global priorities (such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals), and environmental, social and economic challenges (1.1), as well as the complexity and interconnectedness of human and planetary systems (1.2).

1.1

Sustainability challenges



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity


2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS

Your rating

Read the statement.
How would you rate your
course or programme on
this statement? 


"The course or programme links its content to key environmental, social and/or economic challenges around sustainability, helping learners understand their relevance and impact."

Not at all



Very much

First thoughts

Write down your first
thoughts or conclusion,
regarding this topic. 

1.1

Sustainability challenges

Use the guiding questions below to check your initial conclusion and to explore additional opportunities related to this topic. Write down your reflections. ➤

Your reflections



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS

Guiding questions

1

How does the course or programme support students in recognising the immediate and critical nature of global environmental, social and/or economic challenges?

2

In what ways are students encouraged to critically analyse the causes and consequences of these challenges?

3

How are links to the UN Sustainable Development Goals made explicit within the course or programme?

4

How are sustainability challenges integrated into learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments?

5

How are potential synergies or tensions between different sustainability challenges/SDGs addressed?

1.1

Sustainability challenges



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS

Inspiration

Use these tips and resources if you are looking for ideas to strengthen this aspect of your course or programme.

Tip

Pay attention to the emotional journey of the students when confronted with the urgency of sustainability challenges. It may be valuable to create space for acknowledging the emotions that can arise.

Resources



Fireflies: a board game with difficult dilemmas around sustainability developed by Erasmus University, allowing students to express their feelings and opinions.



Student Wellbeing platform for staff: an overview of available resources and support at Erasmus University to enhance student wellbeing.



The Work That Reconnects: this approach by Joanna Macy can inspire in how to make space for emotions, sources to use from this work could be the '**Active Hope Training**' a free online course that students can follow individually or the Podcast '**We Are The Great Turning**'.

1.2

Understanding complexity and inter-connectedness of human and planetary systems

Your rating

Read the statement.
How would you rate your
course or programme on
this statement?

"The course or programme addresses the interconnected nature of environmental, social, and/or economic systems, engaging learners with the inherent complexity, trade-offs, and uncertainties of sustainability."

Not at all ←  → Very much

First thoughts

Write down your first
thoughts or conclusion,
regarding this topic.



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS

1.2

Understanding complexity and inter-connectedness of human and planetary systems

Use the guiding questions below to check your initial conclusion and to explore additional opportunities related to this topic. Write down your reflections. ➤

Your reflections



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS

1

In what ways does the course or programme help students understand sustainability challenges as interconnected systems rather than separate, isolated problems?

2

Does the course help students see how actions can strengthen, weaken, or unintentionally influence outcomes within a larger whole?

3

What examples or case studies are (or could be) used to illustrate the interaction between economic, social and/or environmental systems in practice?

4

Does the course help students understand the complexity of sustainability challenges, often involving different trade-offs, tensions, and different viewpoints rather than simple right-or-wrong answers?

5

Are students invited to critically examine multiple perspectives (e.g. cultural, disciplinary or stakeholder) and reflect on how these shape different interpretations of sustainability challenges?

Understanding complexity and inter-connectedness of human and planetary systems



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS

Inspiration

The following sources can inspire how to integrate the complexity and interconnectedness of sustainability into your education.



TeachEUR theme page Sustainability:

the teaching activities presented at [Systems thinking](#) are relevant to this end.



Transition Makers Toolbox:

the teaching activities presented at the **Thinking** dimension help students understand complexity and interconnectedness.



Use the **SDG wedding cake model** as a visual conversation starter to help students see how environmental, social, and economic goals are interconnected.



2

Educating *for* sustainability

Educating *for* sustainability focuses on agency and contribution. It addresses whether students develop the skills, reflexivity, and capacities (2.1) needed to engage with sustainability challenges, apply knowledge in real-world contexts, and contribute to societal change (2.1).

2.1

Societal engagement



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity


2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS


Your rating

Read the statement.
How would you rate your
course or programme on
this statement? 

"The course or programme enables students to apply (inter)disciplinary knowledge to real-world sustainability challenges through hands-on, collaborative, and experiential learning."

Not at all

Very much **First thoughts**

Write down your first
thoughts or conclusion,
regarding this topic. 

2.1

Societal engagement

Use the guiding questions below to check your initial conclusion and to explore additional opportunities related to this topic. Write down your reflections. ➤

Your reflections

Guiding questions

- 1 How does the course or programme enable students to apply (inter)disciplinary knowledge to sustainability challenges?*
- 2 How do students engage in collaborative projects, experiential activities, or co-creation (with stakeholders) to address sustainability issues?*
- 3 How does the course or programme invite students to develop meaningful interventions within complex sustainability challenges?*
- 4 How are students supported in developing skills to communicate, negotiate, and work effectively across disciplines and beyond the university?*



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS

Inspiration

These resources can inspire how to integrate the societal engagement into your education.



[TeachEUR theme page Sustainability:](#)

This theme page shows many activities to include in your education, specifically activities presented on the pages [Anticipatory](#), [Collaboration](#) and [Integrated problem-solving](#) are relevant in relation to societal engagement.



[Transition Makers Toolbox:](#)

The teaching activities presented at the **Collaborating** dimension are relevant in relation to societal engagement.



The **Impact & Engagement team** within the Community for Learning and Innovation (CLI) has extensive experience developing impact-driven education and can support teachers with questions related to societal engagement in their courses or programs.



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS

Your rating

Read the statement.
How would you rate your
course or programme on
this statement?

"The course or programme fosters reflexivity by engaging learners in critically examining their own values, assumptions, and roles in addressing sustainability challenges, while developing skills to navigate complexity, uncertainty, and ethical trade-offs."

Not at all



Very much

First thoughts

Write down your first
thoughts or conclusion,
regarding this topic.

2.2

Reflexivity

Your reflections

Use the guiding questions below to check your initial conclusion and to explore additional opportunities related to this topic. Write down your reflections. ➤

Guiding questions

- 1 How are students encouraged to critically reflect on their own positionality including their values, assumptions, and perspectives in relation to sustainability challenges?
- 2 How do students engage with ethical dilemmas, conflicting values, or competing priorities?
- 3 How are students supported in navigating uncertainty and ambiguity in sustainability-related decision-making?
- 4 In what ways are students encouraged to consider the societal and environmental impact and long-term consequences in (complex) sustainability contexts?
- 5 How does the course/programme support students in envisioning alternative or more sustainable futures?



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS

Inspiration

The following resources may provide inspiration on teaching activities in relation to reflexivity.



TeachEUR theme page Sustainability:

this theme page shows many activities to include in your education, specifically the activities presented on the pages [Self-awareness](#), [Critical thinking](#) and [Normative](#) are relevant in relation to reflexivity.



Transition Makers Toolbox:

the teaching activities presented at the **Being** dimension are relevant in relation to societal engagement.



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS



Next steps

Next steps

Your actions

Based on your reflections and scores in the previous chapters, consider the questions below to formulate your own actions. ➔



What is one concrete improvement we could implement (in the coming year)?



What support or expertise would we need?



Who could be involved (within or outside EUR)?



INTRODUCTION

SELF-SCAN

1. Educating about sustainability

1.1 Sustainability challenges

1.2 Understanding complexity

2. Educating for sustainability

2.1 Societal engagement

2.2 Reflexivity

NEXT STEPS



Colophon

The Sustainability Self-scan was developed by **Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR)**, in collaboration with [Risbo](#) and funded by **team Impact & Engagement**. For the operationalisation of concepts we used the work of **Karen Maas**, academic director of Impact Centre Erasmus (ICE).

In case of any questions regarding the sustainability framework, you can contact [Linda de Vreede](#), team Impact & Engagement. Did this self-scan led to ideas for adjusting your programme or course, you are welcome to seek support from the [Centre for Learning and Innovation \(CLI\)](#)