

Goethe University's Understanding of Sustainability



Against the backdrop of existing global socio-ecological crises and the inequalities and structural injustices associated with them, **Goethe University Frankfurt acknowledges its social responsibility** and commits to contributing to socio-ecological transformation. This commitment involves consistently aligning all processes related to research, study and teaching, operations, governance, and interactions with society with sustainability in mind.

Goethe University sees sustainability as a search, learning, and design process aimed at enabling a dignified life for present and future generations globally within the planetary boundaries, in accordance with the “Doughnut Economics” model. By formulating dimensions of action, the university aligns itself with the Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), basing the process on the principles of climate justice and the interconnection of environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

This understanding of sustainability serves as the basis for developing Goethe University’s own sustainability strategy, as part of which strategic and operative goals and associated measures will be continuously developed and/or refined, reviewed and implemented. It is considered as given that, as part of their tasks and responsibilities, all Goethe University members and affiliates contribute towards furthering the university’s development as a sustainable organization.

I. Research

Goethe University

- strives to consider ecological, social, and ethical aspects of sustainability in its research activities while respecting the fundamental right to academic freedom. To that end, the university evaluates and continually develops research processes, methods, workflows, and formats in line with sustainability principles.

- intensifies research for and about sustainability, while simultaneously promoting interdisciplinary research activities, thereby contributing to the development of knowledge and concepts for addressing local and global socio-ecological challenges.
- maintains an extensive network of partnerships with institutions at home and abroad, designed and regularly reviewed both structurally and institutionally along sustainability principles.
- advocates for sustainable research and research funding policies locally, nationally, and internationally.

II. Study and Teaching

Goethe University

- strives to further strengthen sustainability, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and issues of global inequalities and injustices as cross-cutting themes in diverse study programs, making them accessible to all students. The university promotes sustainability-related teaching content and competence development as well as participatory, practical, and innovative teaching and learning formats, enabling students to both think and act sustainably.
- supports ESD expertise among all university members, especially educators, teachers and lecturers, to act as multipliers for sustainability.
- creates opportunities for student initiatives and activities for autonomous sustainability education.

III. Interaction with Society/Transfer

Goethe University

- understands transfer in the context of sustainability as a mutual, inclusive, and participatory interaction between science and society that addresses relevant societal issues. As part of this interaction, the university strives to create an exchange on equal terms between societal and scientific actors.
- promotes transdisciplinary research and teaching projects on societal issues collaboratively with practitioners, and communicates the results to a broad audience.
- strengthens support structures for the transfer of technologies and intellectual property that contribute to socio-ecological transformation.
- contributes to the political decision-making process for a sustainable society through research and transparent communication.

IV. Governance

Goethe University

- commits to enabling sustainability within its university structures and processes, including by reviewing and adjusting regulations, frameworks, and strategies, and assigning responsibilities.
- develops a sustainability strategy, including goals and measures for all university areas, as part of a participatory and inclusive process. These goals and measures are continuously reviewed, and their implementation status reported.
- engages transparently and continuously with its own history as a crucial element in developing both its self-understanding as well as its sustainability understanding.

- sees itself as a transcultural space composed of various identities and cultural practices. It involves its members in the process of becoming a sustainable university, considering various and especially international perspectives.

V. Operations

Goethe University

- reflects on the local and global socio-ecological impacts of its operational processes, striving to continuously minimize negative impacts and maximize positive ones.
- aims to operate comprehensively, as soon as possible, in a climate-neutral manner, carefully managing a remaining greenhouse gas budget.
- strives to align all operational processes with the principle of circularity and implement a socio-ecological energy supply by increasing its self-sufficiency.
- works on implementing a biodiverse and barrier-free campus with sustainable supply structures in the interests both of environmental protection and the inclusion of all university members.
- further develops its operational processes for social and ecological sustainability through an indicator-based management system, and transparently communicates challenges and achievements.

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Addendum

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, is a shared concept for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, both now and in the future. Its centerpiece is the [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) representing an urgent call to action for all countries within a global partnership (cf. [United Nations \(2015\) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)).

Climate Justice: The concept of climate justice originated in the environmental and climate justice movements of marginalized population groups. It views the climate crisis as an ethical and political question of social justice, focusing on the unequal distribution of responsibility for and consequences of the climate crisis. While countries in the Global North historically bear the greatest responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions and are therefore the main perpetrators and beneficiaries, countries and regions in the Global South, as well as populations that have contributed the least to climate change, are most affected by its consequences (cf. [Bali Principles of Climate Justice \(2002\)](#)).

Doughnut Economics: The outer boundary of the "Doughnut" in the Doughnut Economics concept is formed by nine dimensions of planetary boundaries, while a social foundation of twelve dimensions secures prosperity internally. The "Doughnut" in between represents the space for safe and just (economic) actions, ensuring that the inner social foundations do not become deficient and the outer ecological boundaries are not exceeded (cf. [Raworth, Kate \(2017\) Doughnut Economics. Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist](#)).

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) empowers individuals to think and act sustainably. It enables everyone to understand the impact of their actions on the world and make responsible decisions. ESD promotes knowledge, awareness, skills, and actions crucial for individual and societal transformation towards sustainability (cf. [Nationaler Aktionsplan Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung \(2017\)](#) and [Education for sustainable development: a roadmap \(2020\)](#)).

Whole Institution Approach: This approach envisages aligning universities' core competencies, academic activities, and operational processes (in research, teaching, transfer, governance, and operation) with sustainability, readjusting them, and consistently intertwining them. This approach is recommended by the World Action Programme on ESD with the Roadmap Education for Sustainable Development 2030, the Nationaler Aktionsplan BNE, and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) (cf. [Hochschulrektorenkonferenz \(2018\) Für eine Kultur der Nachhaltigkeit](#)).