



# Fostering Higher Education for Sustainability-Driven Entrepreneurship

## The CASE Knowledge Platform

*New ways of teaching and learning as well as close cooperation between universities, business and organized civil society are needed to promote sustainable socio-economic development. In the project Competencies for a Sustainable Socio-Economic Development (CASE), members of the Alliance of Sustainable Universities in Austria have set up a knowledge platform to foster sustainability-driven entrepreneurship education.*

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The project *Competencies for a Sustainable Socio-Economic Development (CASE)* (2015 to 2017) (box 1, p. 186) is part of the *Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliance*<sup>1</sup>. CASE has aimed at changing the EU landscape of higher education institutions towards a stronger accentuation on new inter- and transdisciplinary ways of teaching and learning as well as sustainable entrepreneurial education, increasing university-business cooperation, new university spin-offs and start-ups in the area of sustainability-driven entrepreneurship.<sup>2</sup>

The *CASE Knowledge Platform* has been designed to translate major outcomes of the CASE project into practical, user-friendly information, supportive material for cooperation, and inspiring animated short videos. It aims to attract and motivate primarily academic partners such as course

coordinators and curriculum developers to cooperate with business and other sectors. The platform provides innovative teaching methods and tools for a new way of teaching and learning for sustainability-driven entrepreneurship. Moreover, it supports the professionalization of cooperation with external partners in educational settings.

Grounded on research about competencies for sustainability-driven entrepreneurship and methods how to achieve them in higher education (Biberhofer et al. 2016, Bernhardt et al. 2017), the platform provides a variety of good practices, a guide for cooperation, supportive materials, and tools for collaboration between universities and partners from business and civil society.

The development process of the platform was based on testing 21 cooperation formats in five different project regions in Europe (Vienna/AT, Vechta/GER, Brno/CZ, Gothenburg/SWE, Bolzano/IT) involving focus groups, interviews and questionnaires with 214 respondents in total. The openly accessible resources allow the implementation into a multitude of different learning and teaching environments, according to the needs and available means. Besides the possibility of integrating elements into existing courses and the development of new courses, the platform offers a design of a Master curriculum for sustain-

ability-driven entrepreneurship and deeper insights into learning and teaching approaches as well as competencies' development.

### The Challenge – Connecting the Classroom with Reality

Higher education institutions (HEI) have a central role in enabling the decision-makers of tomorrow to develop competencies >

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1 *Knowledge Alliances* are transnational activities promoting exchange and cooperation between universities and business. The participating partners develop multidisciplinary teaching and learning approaches, stimulate entrepreneurial thinking and work on innovative solutions (EACEA 2018).

2 Sustainability-driven entrepreneurship integrates the dimensions of sustainable development into the core business model of companies, thereby contributing to transformation towards sustainability in socio-economic development.

## BOX 1:

## About the CASE Project

The project *Competencies for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development (CASE)* is one of ten projects out of 230 proposals, chosen by the European Commission under the *Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliances*. Under the coordination of the Regional Center of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development Vienna (RCE Vienna), ten partners from five European regions (Vienna/AT, Brno/CZ, Bolzano/IT, Vechta/GER and Gothenburg/SWE) were working in the consortium. Austrian partners are: the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna (BOKU), Wiener Stadtwerke, associates Ashoka, and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW).

that can foster sustainable socio-economic development. The growing need to deal with complex, ambiguous real-world sustainability problems makes a transdisciplinary approach essential – while integrating mono- and interdisciplinary work. Such an approach allows students to develop robust, practice-oriented knowledge and skills.

the project consortium as well as external stakeholders.

For the practical cooperation guide and according support, the participation of key parties, notably business representatives, students, and course teachers, focused on continuous feedback during development. For the testing and evaluation process of

ated based on 21 course formats from the five EU-regions of the *CASE* consortium.

### A Practical Guide for Implementation of Cooperation Formats

To stimulate spreading of good practice, a *cooperation guide* was developed, with the main objective to inspire and to facilitate a successful implementation of cooperation between universities, students, and practical partners. The online presentation at the *Knowledge Platform* comprises the nine cooperation formats shown in table 1. The platform provides a step-by-step guidance as well as an outline of the benefits, success factors, and challenges, complemented by pilot examples, testimonials, and links to supporting material, project examples and experts.

## Open-mindedness and holistic thinking combined with a problem-oriented approach integrate disciplines and methods in a participatory solution development process.

Thus, universities need to intensify university-business collaboration to bridge the theory-practice gap. Communication must be improved to spread good practices of transdisciplinary learning strategies, enabling students to develop diverse sustainability competencies and fostering sustainability-driven entrepreneurship.

### Collaboration for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development

The development process of the tangible outputs at the *Knowledge Platform* followed a multi-stakeholder approach as illustrated in figure 1, involving the members of

regional pilot courses, the actors were involved in the regional piloting of transdisciplinary university courses. All in all, 139 students, 23 teachers, and 52 cooperation partners outside university participated in the collaboration. Their perspective was evaluated based on a qualitative explorative research approach. The empirical material from those three target groups was analyzed in view of the five pillars of the pedagogical framework of the *CASE* master program: competence orientation, learning to learn, real-world orientation, role models, and coaching (Bernhardt et al. 2017). Nine different cooperation formats were evalu-

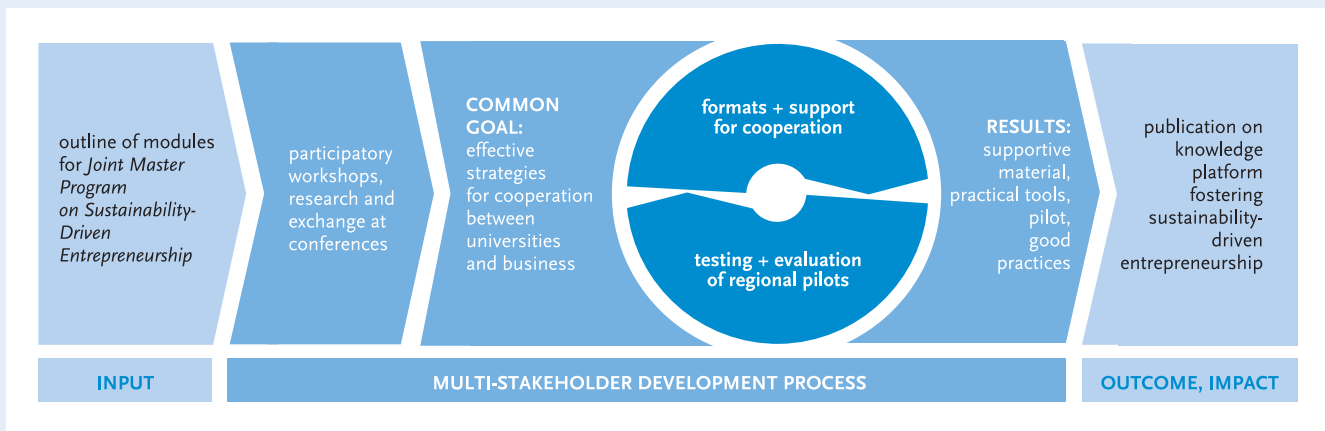
### CASE Sustainability Performance Tool and CASE Sustainability Competencies Tool

To further support the processes of establishing current sustainability efforts and to envision future processes by investigating acquired and needed competencies for sustainability-driven entrepreneurship, two online tools were developed.

The *CASE Sustainability Performance Tool* is a qualitative tool for recording and developing sustainability in companies and non-profit organizations by providing a holistic overview of the interplay between business areas within enterprises. It also reveals op-

TABLE 1: Cooperation formats investigated in the *CASE* project. Source: Bernhardt et al. (2017).

PROJECT-BASED FORMATS				
service learning	participatory research project	entrepreneurial projects	sustainable development case study	sustainability screening
IN THE FIELD				
internship	field trip complemented by case study	excursion		
IN THE CLASSROOM				
guest lecture				



**FIGURE 1:** The interrelated process of joint work for developing effective strategies for cooperation between universities and business partners. Source: Bernhardt et al. (2017, p. 15), adapted by Michael Ambros.

opportunities to systematically identify and further develop sustainability potentials and challenges. The tool was primarily designed for teaching, to support collaborative learning within the frame of transdisciplinary projects between universities and business partners. It builds on interlinking academic and business realities and setting in action a process of mutual understanding of mind-sets, terms and working routines. Accordingly, the tool and the analysis process of using the tool create added value simultaneously for university teaching and entrepreneurial practice.

The fundamental principles for the understanding of a sustainable economy and sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship embedded in the *CASE Sustainability Performance Tool* are based on

- a holistic perspective,
- systemic understanding of organizations,
- transdisciplinary understanding,
- transformation orientation.

By using the tool, the sustainability profile of the whole enterprise is visualized in a radar chart where the performance of the analyzed enterprise is shown for each category.

The second tool developed in the frame of the CASE project, the *CASE Sustainability Competencies Tool*, aims at making the development of competencies for sustainability-driven entrepreneurship visible and comprehensible. It focuses on qualitative reflection and dialogue processes, which

are initiated by using the tool in various forms of self- and external evaluation. Primarily, the tool is meant to be used by students in the context of sustainability-oriented courses at tertiary level. But it can be transferred to sustainability-oriented enterprises and non-profit organizations as well, to support processes of employee development and organization development. The *CASE Sustainability Competencies Tool* underpins the transdisciplinary process, which aims to improve the dialogue between the academic and the business world and to better understand not only mutual needs, but also boundaries.

The key competencies identified for sustainability-driven entrepreneurship (Biberhofer et al. forthcoming) and scrutinized by the tool are

- systemic competencies,
- anticipatory competencies,
- normative competencies,
- strategic competencies,
- interpersonal competencies.

### Effectiveness of Different Teaching Strategies and Cooperation Formats

The tested pedagogical approaches and corresponding formats built on relevant theoretical knowledge. Applied by competent teachers, they not only foster the desired competencies with students but also create inspiration and support partners in finding solutions to real-world sustainability challenges. Open-mindedness and holistic thinking combined with a problem-oriented approach that has local relevance

integrate diverse disciplines and methods in a participatory solution development process. Hence, such approaches seem to hold a strong potential to change entrepreneurial behavior towards sustainable socio-economic development.

**MORE INFORMATION:**  
[www.case-ka.eu](http://www.case-ka.eu)

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