Faculty of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences

Certificate in Sustainable Development and Social Innovation

Programme

- 20 ECTS / 2 to 6 semesters
- Campus Kirchberg
- Core courses: Tuesday evenings
- Optional courses: usually Thursday evenings
- Meetings of peer groups are self-organised
- 200€ / semester

Teaching languages

- English

Applications

- EU applications: 1st April to 1st September 2026

Admission

- The main prerequisite is a strong motivation to engage professionally and or personally to foster societal transformation for sustainability. The selection criteria are specified in the guide for applicants. Fluency in English is required.
- Candidates are selected upon submission of a letter of motivation and CV.

The Certificate aims to provide a better understanding of the complex challenges that societies, organisations and individuals face as we exceed the limits of the biophysical carrying capacity of our planet. Sustainability and Social Innovation are inseparable: Active involvement of both citizens and science is necessary for guiding innovation and understanding impacts of necessary changes in our society, the economy, and in our life styles.

The study programme offers tools for social learning to tap into the collective intelligence of stakeholders and experts. Changes needed in energy, water and food systems, and in how we organize the economy at large are critically discussed.

The courses provide an overview on the most recent insights from academics and practitioners relating to global change and transformative learning for sustainability.

A Certificate created to engage on sustainability

The Certificate targets professionals and students of any degree programme (Bachelor, Master, or Ph.D.) and offers direct experience of engaging and co-creating with a very diverse social learning group. Experiential learning opportunities, including peer group projects on salient problems in Luxembourg, equip participants for making better informed and more reflexive judgments for effective action.

The programme is designed to be compatible with a full-time job or study programme. Students have a choice: They can enrol to obtain the Certificate as second qualification in parallel to pursuing their main degree whilst at the University. Alternatively they can take individual courses as optional courses that count towards their main degree.

Become a change agent to influence the future more effectively.

Programme objectives

Participants will develop the following competences:

• to apply systems thinking to understand the complexity of society, environment and their interactions.

• to respect the conflicting perspectives on an issue that are held by diverse experts and stakeholders, stemming from diversity in experience, values and world views.

• to recognise uncertainties and tensions arising from the gulf between local and global perspectives and modes of inquiry.

• skills in negotiation: respect, listening, giving and taking to find mutually acceptable solutions to complex problems.

• an appreciation of alternative forms of social organization and enterprise for achieving a sustainable economic exchange system.

• to develop 'citizen science' approaches and techniques for creatively integrating the social and scientific emphases of the two phases of the course.

• to engage science and scientists productively in social learning processes with diverse groups of stakeholders for concerted action on local issues of environment and sustainability.

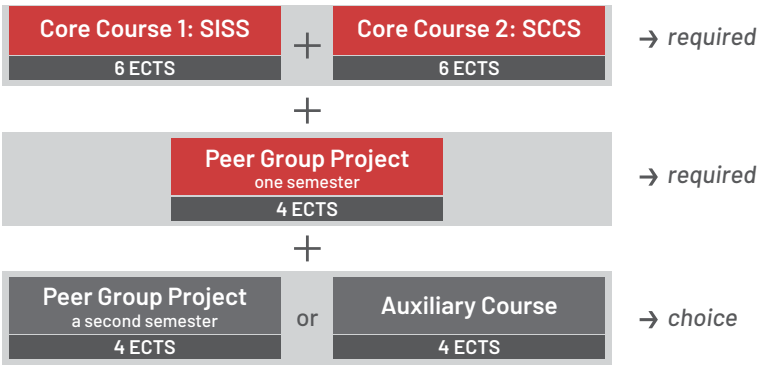
Programme structure and organisation

Core Course 1: Social Innovation and System Shifts (SISS)

Humanity is facing an era of profound disruption, marked by mass species extinction, ecological degradation, and accelerating climate change. These crises are not isolated problems but symptoms of deeper systemic imbalances—interconnected patterns in our food, water, energy, economic and knowledge systems that lock us into unsustainable trajectories. The very systems that sustain us are often riddled with "system traps"—self-reinforcing dynamics such as short-termism that limit our capacity to respond. We therefore need "systemic transformations" – fundamental shifts in the structures, relationships, and logics that underpin our societies - moving beyond surface-level fixes toward lasting change. Without rethinking these systems, efforts to solve ecological and social challenges will continue to fall short. This course, *Social Innovation and System Shift*, is designed to help participants identify and navigate systemic traps, equipping them with practical knowledge and transformative capabilities. Through an exploration of innovative approaches learners will gain the tools to actively contribute to systemic transformations, building pathways toward more resilient, just, and sustainable futures.

Core Course 2: Science and Citizens meet Challenges of Sustainability (SCCS)

What responsibilities can citizens assume in a knowledge society? How can 'science' inform action on complex challenges of sustainability, when the disciplines constrain their gaze on very specific facets in dynamic and complex systems? We think of Science as a social institution, on the analogy of The Law or The Churches or Medicine. We know that most of it is realized by individuals in particular organizations, each with defined tasks, privileges and ethical responsibilities; these are derived from a variety of 'contracts', some explicit with the State, others informal with various sectors of society and individuals. Traditionally science was mostly conceived as autonomous, detached and objective, creating a 'fountain of facts', the fruits of which are passed on to Society. The responsibility of Society traditionally was to provide room and means for science to unfold.



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