



# A Strategy for More Sustainability



Science for Society  
University of Würzburg



The University of Würzburg understands sustainability as the successful implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>1</sup> of the United Nations. Sustainable development is thus understood as concerning local and global aspects of ecological, economic and social sustainability. With this overall institutional sustainability strategy, the University of Würzburg is structuring its comprehensive sustainability goals and making them more tangible and binding. This is intended to promote the major task of transforming itself into a sustainable university, and accomplishing this goal in the four-year period between 2024 to 2028. The university seeks to make both the challenges and successes of this endeavor more transparent by releasing periodic reports on its progress.

All members of the university are called upon to act in their respective spheres of activity in such a way that the University of Würzburg collectively develops into a sustainable university, i.e. a university that acts in the spirit of sustainable development. Following a theoretical categorisation, the goals for the six fields of action – research, studies and teaching, governance, operations, student engagement, exchange with society and transfer – are formulated below. In a separate table<sup>2</sup>, the objectives are concretised and made measurable through several specific measures and indicators.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable\\_Development\\_Goals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_Development_Goals) or <https://17ziele.de/> (German only)

<sup>2</sup> To be found on the website: <https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/university/sustainability/>

# Sustainability – a definition of the term

The University of Würzburg is committed to the guiding principles of sustainable development in the sense of ecologically compatible, socially balanced and economically efficient development. The planetary limits, together with the orientation towards a life of dignity for all, provide the external framework for such development.<sup>3</sup> Based on the Bavarian University Innovation Act<sup>4</sup>, the university is committed to the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity, climate protection and spreading education on sustainable development<sup>5</sup>. It also adheres to ethical principles in the fulfilment of these tasks. All of this is set out in the framework agreement<sup>6</sup> and the university contract<sup>7</sup>.

Sustainable development requires a transformation of society as a whole towards comprehensive socio-ecological action, taking into account economic performance. As a public institution with an educational, research and transfer mandate, the University of Würzburg recognises its special responsibility in contributing to the creation of sustainable social structures and in promoting socio-ecological transformation. In particular, the University of Würzburg wants to establish a ‘culture of sustainability’<sup>8</sup> and educate its students accordingly.

A culture of sustainability can be understood here as a new practice in everyday university life that goes hand in hand with a cross-organisational change in processes and framework conditions. The aim here is to achieve a comprehensive sensitisation to sustainability issues. A culture of sustainability affects all our fields of action in the university system as well as the associated processes, routines, regulatory systems and underlying values<sup>9</sup>. All university members should be encouraged to contribute to shaping a sustainable society and furthering sustainable development.

In order to realise its sustainability aims, the university supports building common understanding and joint actions in the sense of a ‘Whole Institution Approach’, a holistic ap-

proach that takes sustainability into account in all fields of action of the university as previously described and, additionally, establishes it as a guiding principle for action. This approach makes it possible to identify potential conflicts of objectives in the best possible way and provides the basis for meeting sustainability requirements in all fields of action.

This overall institutional sustainability strategy sets out specific goals in the six fields of action of research, study and teaching, governance, operations, student engagement, dialogue with society and transfer. In line with the science-based model of planetary limits and the Wedding Cake model<sup>10</sup>, measures for climate protection, climate adaptation and the promotion of biodiversity are to be intensified as a matter of priority. Specific measures and measurable indicators will then be introduced for all objectives; a core sustainability data set will be set up for monitoring purposes. Building on this, the University of Würzburg will publish a report on the implementation of the sustainability strategy every two years, starting at the end of 2025, in order to report on progress and the current status.

The sustainability strategy is closely interwoven with other university strategies, programmes and projects, such as the equality and diversity concepts and the internationalisation strategy. At a supra-regional level, for example, there are close links with the Bavarian Centre for Higher Education and Sustainability BayZeN and the European university alliance CHARM-EU. This university alliance, of which the University of Würzburg has been a member since 2022, aims to develop a joint European education and research agenda that is based on the challenges of the green and digital transformation and is closely linked to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Digitalisation in general is to be significantly considered and included in relation to the sustainable development of the university.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/1940716/8943e3f421a7a0d8bcd06a1cc66e92d0/2021-07-26-gsds-en-data.pdf?download=1>

<sup>4</sup> Art. 2, para. 7, sentence 1, [https://www.stmwk.bayern.de/download/21907\\_BayHIG.pdf](https://www.stmwk.bayern.de/download/21907_BayHIG.pdf) (German only)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.bmbf.de/EN/Education/Non-FormalEducation/EducationForSustainableDevelopment/educationforsustainabledevelopment\\_node.html](https://www.bmbf.de/EN/Education/Non-FormalEducation/EducationForSustainableDevelopment/educationforsustainabledevelopment_node.html)

<sup>6</sup> Section 9, [https://www.stmwk.bayern.de/download/22215\\_Rahmenvereinbarung-2023-2027\\_ohne-Unterschrift.pdf](https://www.stmwk.bayern.de/download/22215_Rahmenvereinbarung-2023-2027_ohne-Unterschrift.pdf) (German only)

<sup>7</sup> Section 9, [https://www.stmwk.bayern.de/download/22332\\_Uni-Wuerzburg.pdf](https://www.stmwk.bayern.de/download/22332_Uni-Wuerzburg.pdf) (German only)

<sup>8</sup> Cf. also the recommendation of the HRK <https://www.hrk.de/resolutions-publications/resolutions/beschluss/detail/towards-a-culture-of-sustainability/>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. <https://www.duz.de/beitrag/!/id/1618/vom-ziel-zur-normalitaet> (German only)

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.bmu.de/themen/nachhaltigkeit/integriertes-umweltprogramm-2030/planetare-belastbarkeitsgrenzen> (German only) and <https://www.uni-hamburg.de/en/nachhaltigkeit/verstaendnis/sdgs.html>. The wedding cake model organises the Sustainable Development Goals in a kind of ranking or tiered order because some goals represent non-negotiable planetary limits. Compliance with the planetary limits and the preservation of the biosphere are seen as the basis. The goals associated with this form the foundation of the cake and thus determine other goals. The SDGs aimed at respecting planetary boundaries will be prioritised in their implementation.

## Research

In the context of the field of research, the University of Würzburg addresses both research that deals with sustainability issues (sustainability research) and sustainable action in the context of research (sustainability in the research process), for example in research activities in the laboratory or the organisation of conferences. The combination of both topics can lead to paradoxical or conflict-laden situations. These should be actively addressed.

The aim of *sustainability research* is to scientifically analyse real sustainability problems in order to understand and shape change processes and their foundations. Sustainability research thus contributes to solutions at the local, regional and global level. Sustainability research is an interdisciplinary cross-sectional topic that requires the co-operation of all sciences. The University of Würzburg strongly promotes interdisciplinary research and intends to further strengthen transdisciplinary research with this strategy. This is based on an intensive scientific exchange with practice partners and is characterised by a critical reflection of its own (both academic and specialist) positions. Viewing and understanding science in this way in relation to other social fields of

action makes it possible to contribute to sustainable development both locally and globally.

In 2022, the university founded the sustainability laboratory WueLAB<sup>11</sup> as a central scientific institution to take an in-depth scientific look at the requirements associated with establishing a culture of sustainability. Here, research work with a scientific and technical focus as well as perspectives from the social sciences and humanities will be brought to bear and incorporated.

Active participation by employees and students is essential for the creation of a sustainable university. This is why transformation experiments are carried out at WueLAB. These are cross-status group and cross-disciplinary projects with experimental elements or practical components that work towards a socio-ecological transformation of society or the promotion of biodiversity or climate protection, i.e. are classified as transformative research. Any member of the University of Würzburg can apply for such a transformation experiment or join existing projects and initiatives and thus participate in the processes of sustainable development.



*How does human influence on the environment affect bees and other insects? This question is a focus of research at the Biocentre.*

*Sustainability in the research process* is a further focus in this field. The University of Würzburg will increasingly organise its research activities in line with social, ecological and economic sustainability goals. This includes the responsible use of material, financial and human resources. In particular, the university will promote a debate on the ecological footprint of research, as promoted by the German Research Foundation (DFG)<sup>12</sup>.

An important prerequisite for the social success and benefit of scientific research, for example to alleviate the climate crisis or for climate adaptation, is trust in the results of free science and in the integrity of researchers. The University of Würzburg is therefore committed to good scientific practice, open science, professional research data management and transparent and target group-oriented scientific communication.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. <https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/wuelab/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.dfg.de/en/service/press/press-releases/2023/press-release-no-28>



## Study and teaching

As a training centre for researchers, future teachers and managers as well as decision-makers in business and society, the University of Würzburg has a special responsibility. The university aims to provide its students with the necessary (specialised) knowledge, the necessary design skills and the foundations for ways of thinking and acting that are essential for understanding the complex topic of sustainable development in its many facets. It also endeavours to enable students to actively participate in the transformation towards a more socially just and ecologically integrated society and to meet current and future challenges in a reflective, constructive and empathetic manner.

The University of Würzburg will therefore structurally anchor the cross-sectional task of (higher) education for sustainable development, introduce various teaching formats in the faculties and qualify (teacher training) students in terms of education for sustainable development (ESD). In addition, a special focus will be placed on the qualification of teachers in the field of higher education for sustainable development (HBNE).

The university will continue to develop further degree programmes with a focus on sustainability, offer additional

qualifications and at the same time increasingly address aspects of social sustainability in its degree programmes. Student diversity is seen as a facet of social sustainability and is strongly encouraged by the university.



*At the Botanical Garden, students are developing interactive treasure hunts that can be found using a QR code and played on smartphones or tablets with the corresponding app.*

## Governance

To establish a culture of sustainability, the University of Würzburg will additionally embed the topic of sustainable development in its organisational structures.

The University of Würzburg views sustainable development as a strategic task for both internal processes (such as communication and participation) and structures (such as committees, etc.). Sustainable development is the (organisational) task of all members of the university. However, the main responsibility has now been established as an independent area of responsibility of the Vice President's Office and of the Sustainability Commission. At the university management level, sustainability officers will be established in the various faculties and central (academic) institutions. A contact point for operational sustainability issues and an energy management team have also been established in the university's operations area. Good and responsible management of the university and a sustainable personnel policy are to be further promoted. In this way, the strategic goal of sustainable development will be encouraged and implemented for all employees and in all areas of the university.

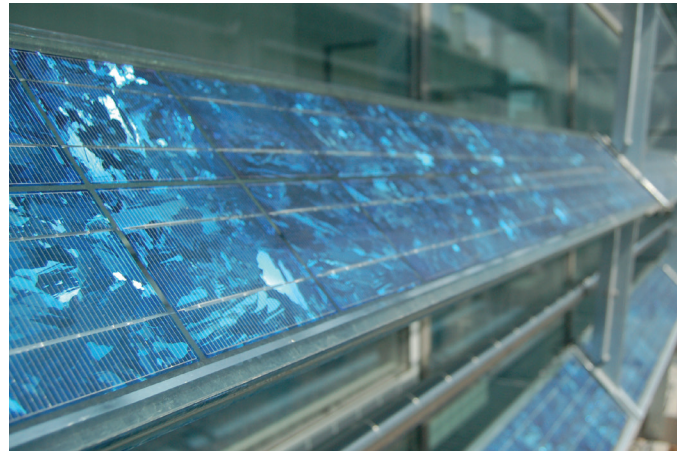
To implement this sustainability strategy and achieve the objectives formulated therein, measures and indicators are being introduced that were developed in a process involving all status groups, which are fully summarised in the comprehensive table. Through reporting and increased communication on sustainability issues, further tools are used and commitments created to measure, monitor and manage the implementation of sustainability goals. University-wide communication and recognition of actions in terms of sustainable development are also intended to raise awareness.

The University of Würzburg realises that an increased commitment to sustainable development occurs particularly when appropriate psychological, social and material resources are available. It will therefore promote the university culture, organisational development, personnel development and leadership in the sense of corporate social responsibility and continue its efforts in the areas of equality, diversity, anti-discrimination, inclusion and prioritise the health of employees and students.

## Operation

In 2025, the University of Würzburg will publish its first comprehensive greenhouse gas footprint using the BayCalc tool<sup>13</sup>, which is based on the Green House Gas Protocol<sup>14</sup>, and develop a reduction pathway for reducing greenhouse gas emissions based on this. At the same time, it will focus on lowering the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on all university's property. The university will strive to reduce its energy consumption in relation to its net floor space and increase energy efficiency. The proportion of self-generated electricity from renewable energy sources will be increased with the installation of a ground-mounted solar power system. At the same time, measures will be taken to increase biodiversity on the campus grounds. Resource conservation of paper, chemicals, digital devices and much more will be taken into account both centrally and peripherally. Furthermore, sustainability in procurement and purchasing is anchored in the university's guideline.

Based on scientific findings, climate-friendly mobility will also be promoted at the University of Würzburg and anchored as an example of good practices. In addition, the aim is



*Solar panels on the pharmacy building*

to design the planned structural development of the campus areas while considering social sustainability, climate change adaptation and aspects of biodiversity promotion and nature and animal protection.

## Student commitment



*Seeds are also propagated in the CampusGarden.*

The University of Würzburg recognises the great importance and added value of student engagement, student co-determination and participation in the various university committees and initiatives, such as the Student Speakers' Council, the various departments and the CampusGarten. This commitment contributes to the further development of the entire university and the well-being of the student body and should also be promoted accordingly in the future. Incentives and recognition for the commitment of students are to be expanded; furthermore, a regular exchange between the student representatives, university management and the heads of the faculties will be updated and expanded.

The new Students' House is a clear example of the goal to expand the space for student ideas, joint activities and exchange.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. <https://www.nachhaltighochschule.de/arbeitsgruppen/ag-thg-bilanzierung/> (German only)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. <https://ghgprotocol.org/>



# Exchange with society and transfer of ideas

The University of Würzburg strives for close connections and fruitful exchanges with society in the city and region as well as nationally and internationally through internal and external cooperation projects related to sustainability and through memberships in sustainability networks.

By communicating sustainability-relevant research results and measures to the outside world, the aim is to raise society's awareness of sustainable development issues and for all areas of the university to act as a catalyst for overall social transformation processes in the city and region. At the same time, the university wants to increasingly incorporate practical knowledge and corresponding suggestions into its research and teaching and thus promote interdisciplinary research. To this end, subject-specific, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary activities in research and teaching with a

connection to sustainability will be increasingly publicised. In addition, start-up opportunities in the field of social or ecological sustainability will be highlighted. The University of Würzburg is also endeavouring to help alleviate the shortage of academically trained specialists, particularly in the context of sustainable development, who are urgently needed to tackle the multiple global challenges.

Memberships in networks such as BayZeN (Bavarian Centre for Higher Education and Sustainability) or the European university alliance CHARM-EU also promote cross-university exchange and topic-specific cooperation. By taking part in these network meetings and working groups, university-specific sustainability aspects can be specifically focused on and work on climate issues can be more successfully carried out and implemented.



*Rooted in Würzburg, JMU shines far beyond the region.*

## Legal notice

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