

A photograph of a forest path with green and yellowing leaves on the trees and ground. Three people are walking away from the camera on the path. The image is slightly blurred, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Transfer and Cooperation Projects for Sustainable Transformation

An Overview of Projects and Support Structures
at Universities in Switzerland 2026

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Editorial

There's growing recognition that universities and educational institutions have a key role to play in shaping a just, livable future for all. It's becoming clear that incremental tweaks or tech fixes aren't enough—we need a deeper redesign of our socio-economic and democratic systems to stay within planetary boundaries.

Meanwhile, outside academia, the One Planet Lab witnesses how pioneers are already building pieces of that future: such as citizens' assemblies, local currencies for regional food systems (franc paysan), solidarity-based income models (Ting), co-created visions (monda futura), and new ways to make good food accessible for all (Calim). These projects bring the necessary momentum, creativity and strong local roots—but could benefit from scientific backing, methodological support, and institutional legitimacy to enable scaling, and support policy uptake.

The real-world experiments in this publication give hope. They show what's possible when institutions dare to tackle root causes—staying true to the meaning of “radical”—and build in real-world challenges from the start. This publication is a spark for bolder collaboration, and the One Planet Lab by WWF Switzerland can be one of the bridges to the pioneers in practice. The challenge is huge - but step by step, together, we can redesign the systems we—and the living world—depend on.



Laurène Descamps,
Co-responsible, One Planet Lab FR & DE
(WWF Switzerland)

In our daily work as integration experts in transdisciplinary research projects, we experience firsthand the value created when scientific, practical, and regional knowledge are combined. Sustainable contributions emerge when knowledge flows in both directions: researchers gain valuable real-world insights, while practitioners benefit from current research findings, new perspectives, and opportunities for reflection.

We observe a particularly high level of commitment and shared ownership when practice and academic partners collaborate on equal footing through co-production processes. Especially in well-organised collaborations between researchers, students and practitioners: learning happens not only from each other, but with each other. They engage with real-world challenges, learn to integrate local contexts and practical knowledge in research. Such processes bring joy, purpose, and sometimes frustration, yet it is precisely through navigating these experiences together that new and shared understandings emerge beyond disciplinary boundaries.

However, effective actor engagement requires time and supportive conditions to carefully build up trust for respectful and long-term partnerships. Strengthening these conditions will create the foundation for broader societal transfer and sustainability transformation with a lasting value for academia, society, and the environment alike.



Philipp Lischer (ETH Zurich) and Tim Geiges (WSL)
Co-Leaders of the Real-world lab Jurapark Aargau

Management Summary

In this era of global polycrisis, new and effective approaches to sustainability transformation are needed. Sustainability transformation refers to the shift toward an economic system and way of life that respects planetary boundaries and meets the legitimate needs of all people. Within the ‘Third Mission’ (alongside the ‘missions’ of research and teaching), transfer and cooperation projects between universities and practice partners have great potential to promote learning processes for all stakeholders involved and to develop innovative, effective and scalable approaches to the sustainability transition. However, the challenges are considerable: differing objectives and expectations among project partners, resource requirements, the need for coordination, to name only a few. National funding structures do in part support the approaches discussed here, but do not focus on transfer and cooperation approaches for sustainable development. At some universities, however, centers of excellence with this focus have emerged, and there are a few centers of excellence involving several universities.

A non-representative survey on transfer and cooperation projects at Swiss universities highlights current trends: Most projects focus on exchanges within transdisciplinary research networks. Several projects focus on education or food and agriculture, but there is a wide range of other topics. The most frequently mentioned research approaches were: Living Labs, Real-World-Experiments, Real-World-Laboratories and Citizen Science. The most common learning methods in the field of sustainability transfer are Problem-based-learning, Project-based-Learning and Learning in Living Labs. Half of the projects have a total budget of over 100,000 Swiss francs and only a few have a budget of less than 10,000 Swiss francs. The vast majority of projects last between one and four years. A number of particularly interesting projects in Switzerland and Europe are presented in this report.

Many projects in Switzerland focus on research objectives rather than on contributing to the sustainability transition (Third Mission). Consequently, university researchers play a dominant role, whilst practice partners play a subordinate one. In many projects, few or no students are involved.

Recommendations

Our recommendations for Swiss universities and funding bodies are as follows:

1. **Strategy:** Development and implementation of a third mission strategy on a national level by Swiss universities and at individual university level
2. **Framework conditions:** expand funding structures, resources and cross-university collaboration to strengthen the third mission, and in particular transfer and cooperation projects for the sustainability transformation; in state research and innovation funding, specifically promote transfer and cooperation projects for the sustainability transformation
3. **Approaches and projects:** start from a relevant sustainability challenge and tackle, implement and further develop it in an ambitious and scalable manner
4. **Understanding of transfer:** develop a transfer mindset at universities; involve practice partners right from the design stage and cooperate on an equal footing; learning processes for all participants; strive for co-creation
5. **Students:** involve them more closely; involve more students through links with practical modules and utilize these for the practical acquisition of knowledge and the development of students’ skills; harness students’ potential and creativity through student projects

1. Objectives and Approaches of Transfer and Cooperation Projects for Sustainability Transformation

1.1. The Contribution of Universities to Sustainable Development and the Aim of this Publication

With just under five years to go until the target year of the 2030 Agenda, most of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN and its 169 member states in 2015 are far from being achieved. In some cases, there has even been a regression. Governments around the world are heavily preoccupied with a wide variety of global and local crises, which, in public perception, have merged into a permanent polycrisis, triggering fear for the future and a sense of hopelessness in many people. The priorities of the decision-makers in politics, business and society are currently mostly not focused on sustainable development. Whilst this is understandable in the short term, it is completely irresponsible in the long term – as sustainable development is the best prevention against climate, biodiversity, hunger, energy and economic crises, as well as against pandemics, autocracies and wars. The world's decision-makers would therefore do well to finally adopt and implement a consistent sustainability policy. Admittedly, the challenges are immense, the interests of the public and the business sector are often conflicting, and some SDGs are in tension with one another in terms of content. Politics and administration cannot tackle this alone – everyone is needed: the business sector, civil society, culture and education – and in particular universities.

Universities can probably make their greatest contribution through teaching and continuing education: every year, around 70,000 students obtain a degree comprising at least 60 ECTS credits at a Swiss university (*BFS 2024*). If these future and current specialists and managers can acquire a broad knowledge and understanding of sustainable development, this will have a significant positive impact in the medium term.

Research, however, enjoys considerably greater prestige. It, too, can make an important contribution to sustainable development: by investigating complex human-environment interactions, by drawing attention to new and relevant problems and challenges, by researching and developing new approaches and products, and by highlighting relevant interrelationships and impacts, as well as by communicating appropriate and contemporary perspectives on the world and humanity.

However, research can almost never generate direct benefits in the real world. That is why there have been tried-and-tested partnerships and collaborations between research and non-university partners for decades – particularly between universities of applied sciences and research institutions working with industry to develop innovative solutions and products.

The 'Third Mission' approach goes significantly further and proclaims, alongside research and teaching, a third mission for universities in the service of society and the promotion of sustainable development. The focus is neither on research nor financial interests, but on the universities' ideological commitment to sustainable development. This involves a transdisciplinary, multi-layered and practice-oriented approach to tackling concrete challenges in close collaboration with partners in the field. Specific technical innovations may form part of this but are usually not the central focus. The aim is often social innovation or regulatory learning (*Wuppertal Institut 2020, 2025*) so that the approaches developed are implementable, can actually be put into practice by the relevant stakeholders, and may even lead to meaningful and effective regulatory solutions.

This publication is aimed at researchers, lecturers, students and practitioners (companies, local authorities, NGOs) with an interest in sustainable development – but also at decision-makers in universities, education administration and funding bodies. The aim is to highlight the diverse opportunities, success factors and challenges of transfer and cooperation projects for the sustainability transition at Swiss universities, and to motivate university stakeholders – using concrete examples from Switzerland and abroad – to move even more strongly in this direction and tackle ambitious projects. Based on the results of a survey, conclusions will be drawn and recommendations formulated – for the funding and implementation of innovative and effective transfer and cooperation projects for the sustainability transition in Switzerland.

1.2. Transfer and Cooperation Approaches

Collaboration between universities and non-academic partners is nothing new. Contract research, research partnerships between public and private research institutions, and practice-oriented student projects and dissertations carried out in collaboration with partners from the professional world have probably existed for as long as universities have. Over the last two decades, this has given rise to an understanding of knowledge transfer and collaboration that can be divided into various fields of transfer (see fig. 1). This publication focuses primarily on the fields of ‘Research and Development with Society’ and ‘Transfer-Oriented Teaching and Continuing Education’.

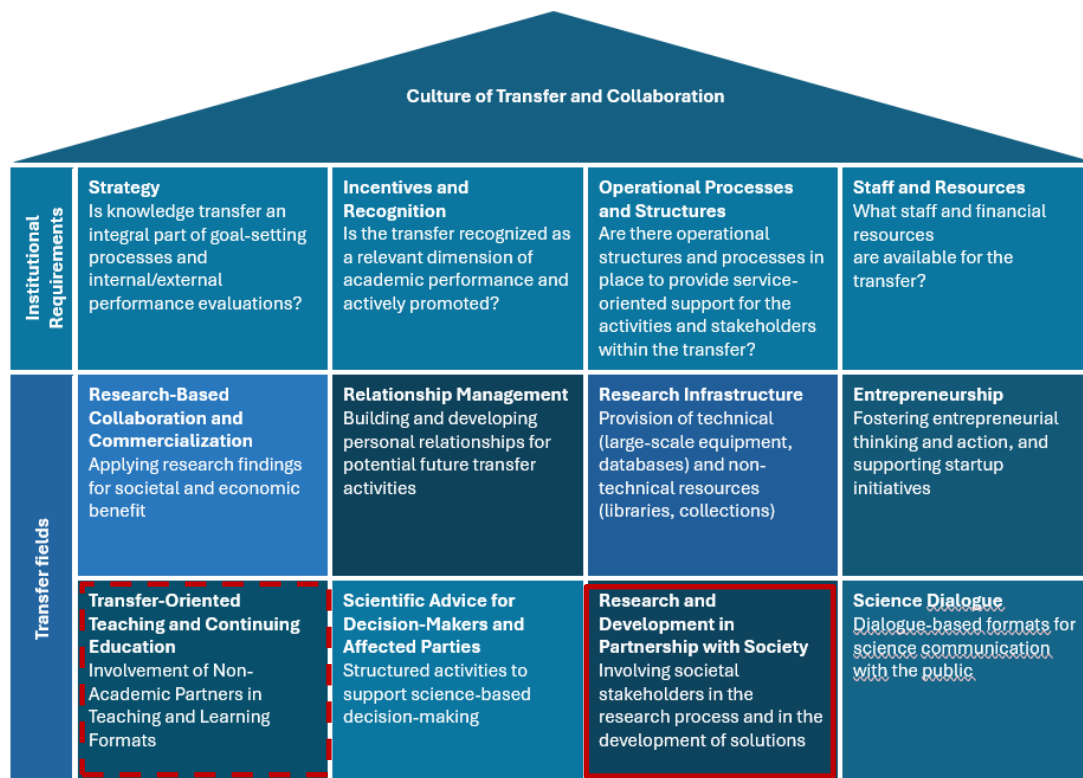


Figure 1: A classification system for a broad understanding of transfers (source: *Stifterverband 2024*, translated from German)

The figure above also shows that, for all these approaches, a culture of transfer and cooperation must be developed at universities and institutional prerequisites (strategy, incentives and recognition, operational processes and structures, staff and resources) must be established.

In this publication, the focus lies not on the transfer in general, but only on the area of ‘sustainability transfer’ (see fig. 2). The sub-sector aimed at contributing to sustainable development is referred to as the ‘Third Mission’. Accordingly, the ‘Teaching’ and ‘Research’ sectors primarily contribute to the two traditional core tasks of universities – although many approaches and projects have multiple target areas, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis.

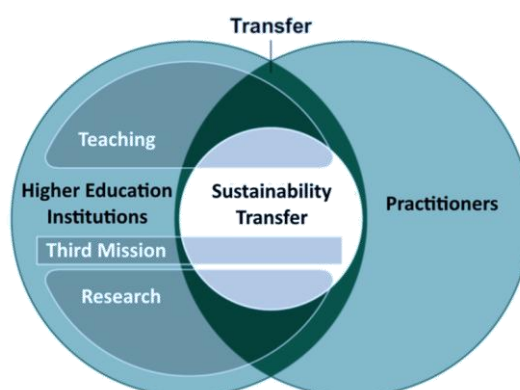


Figure 2: Sustainability Transfer (source: *Demele et al 2021*)

The prerequisites, areas of action and objectives of cooperation between universities and industry partners to promote sustainability transfer can be illustrated by the following diagram (see fig. 3).

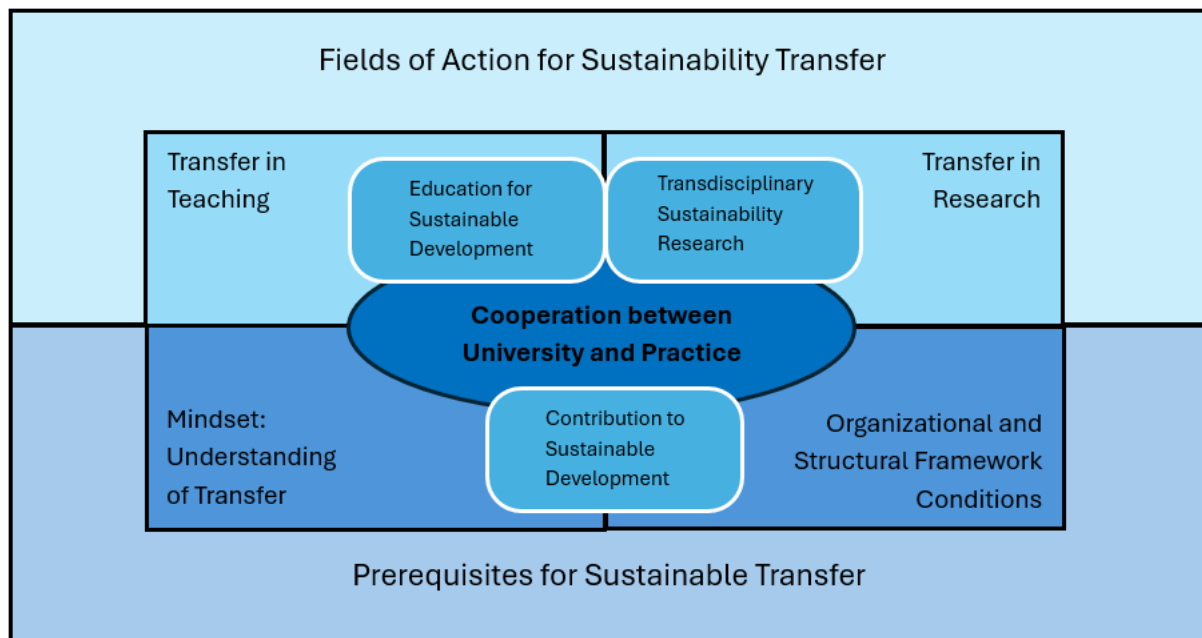


Figure 3: Fields of Action and Prerequisites for Sustainability Transfer (source: [HochN 2021](#), translated from German)

Framework conditions: A distinction can be made between external and internal framework conditions:

Framework conditions for (sustainability) transfer	
External structural conditions	
• Legal regulations (university laws, etc.) • Resource allocation (university funds, grants, research budgets, etc.) • Incentive schemes (Innovative Universities funding initiative, transfer audit) • Societal demand for industry-university collaborations (reputation, rankings, etc.)	
Internal university organisational conditions	
• Formal regulations: curricula, examination regulations, research agendas, cooperation agreements directly relating to knowledge transfer, regulations for work placements, patents, etc. • University governance: objectives for sustainability transfer, transfer strategy, sustainability strategy, internal university incentive schemes, etc. • Resource allocation: time, premises, staff, funding for transfer • Organisational support structures: transfer offices, sustainability officers, etc. • Specific interface management for sustainability transfer: establishing contacts, organisational support, facilitating the exchange of experiences and reflection processes • University and knowledge communication on sustainability transfer	

(source: [HochN 2021](#), translated from German)

Mindset: Universities set themselves apart from the non-academic world through specific, long-established ways of thinking, speaking, acting and structuring. Only in this way can they carry out their teaching and research duties within a 'semi-protected space'. However, the transfer approach now requires an openness to non-academic logics and perspectives and a corresponding expansion of one's own ways of thinking, speaking, acting and structuring. Every higher education institution, every department and every academic stakeholder must reflect on and decide what kind of transfer and cooperation can and should be pursued – and what should not.

Teaching: “Sustainability transfer in teaching is characterised by the embedding of teaching and learning processes in real professional and social contexts. Sustainability transfer in teaching enables an explicit link to practice to be established: practitioners give talks in the lecture, students seek solutions to practical problems or learning processes on sustainability emerge jointly among students, practitioners and lecturers. The focus is on application-oriented and theory-guided learning in practice, for practice and with practice. By involving practitioners, new teaching and learning contexts are created in which students themselves can become change agents. Sustainability transfer thus supports the competence-oriented nature of learning processes in the spirit of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) by embedding them in real-world contexts. This enables students to apply and deepen the theoretical and methodological knowledge gained during their studies in their professional and personal lives. They engage in learning and negotiation processes, communicate with various stakeholders and take on different roles. They must set their own goals and critically examine their actions. In this way, they acquire social, communicative, and personal skills that are difficult to develop through traditional, highly cognitively oriented teaching.” (*HochN 2021*, translated from German)

Research: “Sustainability transfer in research addresses current issues through dialogue with practitioners in order to bring scientific findings into society and, conversely, to incorporate societal impulses. Sustainability issues are generally highly complex and touch upon several scientific disciplines as well as societal fields. Often, this complexity can only be grasped and understood through the exchange of knowledge and experience. Within the framework of transdisciplinary sustainability research, the practical knowledge of non-academic stakeholders can be integrated into the research process to identify research needs relevant to practice and to develop appropriate solutions through cooperation between academia and the field. For this reason, the transfer of sustainability in research can draw inspiration from the concepts of transdisciplinary and transformative sustainability research, which aim to contribute to solving sustainability problems in collaboration with partners from the field.” (*HochN 2021*, translated from German)

Contribution to sustainable development: Whilst the objectives of research and teaching lie within the universities, the “Third Mission” targets objectives outside the universities. The aim of “third mission engagement” is to achieve a more or less direct impact on one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals through communication, networking, learning support, innovation, interventions, investigation, development and evaluation. Unlike fully funded research or consultancy contracts, the commitment of university stakeholders plays a key role. This enables the university to establish itself more effectively and visibly within society.

“Reflection is a central feature of sustainability transfer. The underlying understanding of sustainability and the desired focus on the common good cannot be justified solely on scientific grounds, but rather rest on negotiations among the stakeholders. Science can contribute important competencies to this process through theoretical and empirical knowledge, methodological expertise, and deliberative discourse. Reflection is necessary not only for the sustainability orientation of the transfer and the resolution of sustainability problems, but also for avoiding risks, identifying “blind spots” and unintended consequences, and dealing with uncertainty and gaps in knowledge, etc.” (*HochN 2021*, translated from German)

The initiative for a Third Mission project can come from researchers, lecturers, students or even from sustainability practitioners. The latter often pursue a clear goal of promoting a specific sustainability objective, but require the knowledge, systemic and critical thinking, research and evaluation skills, and ideas provided by academia and students. Conversely, practitioners know their field of action and the other stakeholders within it, as well as potential solutions and practical challenges. Most projects are locally or regionally focused. Projects at national and, in particular, international level can be innovative and exciting, but they involve a significant increase in complexity, particularly in terms of coordination.

Even with a focus on the Third Mission, research and teaching objectives can be pursued in parallel if students are involved in the projects.

1.3. Forms and formats

With regard to interaction with non-university partners, three types can be broadly distinguished, although increased interaction also entails greater complexity (see fig. 4).

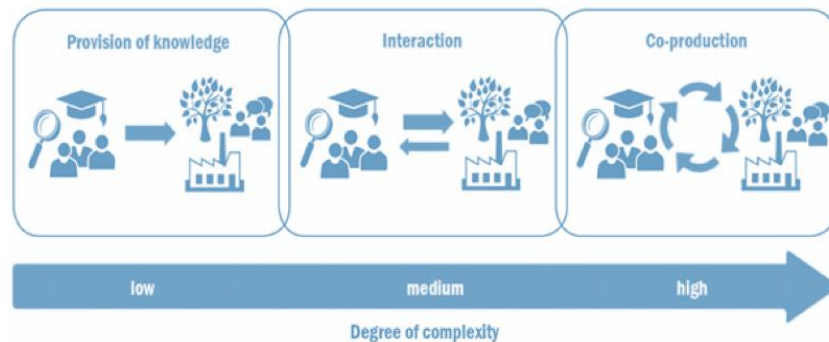


Figure 4: Forms of Transfer and Cooperation (source: *Demele et al 2021*)

In the case of a **supply-oriented approach**, the focus is on a largely one-way transfer of knowledge and technologies from the university to practice (particularly from research for application in a practical context). The university makes offers to societal actors and unilaterally conveys insights, knowledge and products from teaching and research, without first determining societal needs in detail and without seeking feedback on the impact of the transfer from practitioners.

Characteristics: unilateral, low intensity, low resource input, high reach

Interaction refers to a more complex form of exchange. University stakeholders strive to ensure that the sustainability transfer has an impact; in order to address this sustainability impact in a targeted manner, feedback from practitioners and feedback loops during the transfer process are required. To this end, universities ascertain the needs and challenges faced in practice, and there is a reciprocal exchange of information, knowledge, assessments and experiences between the transfer stakeholders.

Characteristics: reciprocal, medium intensity, medium use of resources, medium number of participants

Co-production occurs when higher education institutions engage in transfer to tackle complex sustainability problems, working on them together with practitioners using scientific methods, i.e. jointly designing and implementing the transfer process. All transfer actors contribute their expertise, strengths and perspectives to joint learning and research processes. The key feature of co-production is cooperation on an equal footing.

Characteristics: joint and on an equal footing, intensive interaction, high resource input, small number of transfer participants. (*HochN 2021*)

This publication focuses on the ‘co-production’ format and, to some extent, on the ‘exchange’ format.

Formats: Depending on the varying degrees of complexity, there are different formats for joint research and development between university stakeholders and non-university partners. However, these cannot be clearly distinguished from one another:

- **Co-creation formats** are open-ended, solution- or implementation-oriented cooperation formats
- **Citizen science** is a form of science in which research is carried out with the active participation of interested members of the public. They report observations, carry out measurements or analyse data. The level of participation in citizen science projects can vary greatly.
- **Transdisciplinary research projects:** Transdisciplinarity defines science and research with a view to non-scientific, societal developments and problems that require cross-disciplinary solutions. Transdisciplinary research aims to involve stakeholders outside the scientific community in the development of research questions and solutions.

- **Community-based research:** In this research approach, civil society not only serves as a point of reference for the research but is actively involved in the process – from the formulation of the research question through the selection of methods to the interpretation of the results.
- **Real-world laboratories and living labs** (in German-speaking countries, “living lab” refers usually to a smaller form of real-world laboratory) have become more widespread in recent years and denote a transdisciplinary research and development facility. Science and society work together on solutions. Universities, local authorities, NGOs, businesses, government bodies and associations come together under the guiding principle of sustainable development as pioneers of change in real-world laboratories. Real-world laboratories experiment, develop, test and explore new ideas. Initiating transformation processes in a participatory and cooperative manner and sustaining both scientific and societal learning processes are key objectives of real-world laboratory work. (*Stifterverband 2024*)

There are also various formats for transfer-oriented teaching and continuing professional development:

- **Practice-integrated degree programmes and continuing education programmes:** Students acquire part of the knowledge to be acquired and the skills to be developed through a partner in the field. Internships are only included if their content is closely linked to the degree programme and if practice partners and lecturers work closely together.
- **Transdisciplinary undergraduate dissertations and PhD theses:** In the case of transdisciplinary dissertations and PhD projects, the research question is ideally proposed by the industry partner and refined in collaboration with the academic supervisor (in the case of PhDs, together with the PhD candidate). These formats also require close collaboration between internal and external supervisors.
- **Transdisciplinary practical modules:** Students acquire knowledge and develop their skills through practical projects, which they usually choose or design themselves. This format often, though not always, involves practitioners from the field. The main pedagogical approaches are: project-based learning, problem-based learning and service learning.

1.4. Impact on sustainability

The intended goal of the projects described in this publication is to have an impact on sustainability transformations. Assessing the impact of sustainability-oriented transfer activities is challenging. Impacts often emerge through complex interactions, may only become visible over time, and can include unintended effects. Nevertheless, because transfer activities aim to contribute to sustainable development, their intended sustainability impacts should be considered and integrated into the project process from the very beginning.

Approaches from transdisciplinary sustainability research provide useful guidance for assessing sustainability impacts. A common framework distinguishes different levels of impact. These impacts can be assessed according to their spatial, temporal, and stakeholder dimensions, the forms of impact (e.g. learning processes, capacity building, network effects, or improvements in practice), and the outcomes they produce, such as practical tools or guidelines.

First-order impacts are limited in space and time, depending on the framework of the transfer project itself and affect directly involved partners. They typically include learning processes, the integration of scientific and practical knowledge and the development of context-specific solutions. Depending on the project, additional effects such as capacity building or network development may also emerge.

Second-order impacts occur when project results are taken up by actors beyond the framework of the transfer project. Knowledge is shared through networks, peer-to-peer exchange, intermediaries, or replication in other projects and contexts. At this level, practical outputs such as workshops, guidelines, tools, and prototypes play an important role in supporting wider dissemination.

Third-order impacts arise when project outcomes become institutionalised or are adopted across a broader field of practice. Examples include changes in regulations, standards, organisational practices, or long-term structures. These impacts build on the outcomes and effects generated at the previous levels. (*HochN 2021*)

2. Methodological approach

The following chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this report. The analysis is based on a literature review, complemented by online research and an additional questionnaire-based survey. The online research focused on prominent universities, initiatives and projects recognised for their engagement in transdisciplinary research and sustainability transformations. Particular attention was paid to identifying a diverse range of project formats and geographical contexts, both within Switzerland and across Europe. The projects presented in this report were selected based on the availability of information, their relevance to the scope of the report, and their potential to illustrate a variety of thematic areas and methodological approaches. As such, the selected cases are intended not to provide a comprehensive overview, but rather to serve as illustrative examples and sources of inspiration for readers interested in sustainability-oriented transfer and cooperation projects.

As noted above, transfer and cooperation projects in Switzerland were identified through a targeted survey, whereas the European projects included in this report were primarily identified through online research and, where necessary, supplemented with information obtained directly from project representatives. Sustainability officers and representatives at universities and higher education institutions were contacted via email and invited either to submit projects through the survey or to forward the questionnaire to relevant project coordinators. The survey was not designed as a representative study but rather as a complementary tool to address gaps in the available literature and generate additional qualitative insights. This mixed-method approach was considered particularly appropriate, as many established and long-running projects have already been publicly documented, whilst newer or ongoing initiatives often provide only limited publicly accessible information. The survey therefore facilitated the inclusion of projects and perspectives that may not yet be visible through conventional online sources.

The data collection period for the survey ran from 18 March to 19 April 2026. The questionnaire (Appendix) consisted of single-choice, multiple-choice and open-ended questions covering topics such as the selection of practice partners, the integration of students into the respective projects, project approaches and descriptions, and objectives for teaching, research and the transition to sustainability. Quantitative analyses were conducted only for comparable variables, whilst qualitative findings from the survey, online research, and literature review were incorporated illustratively and contextualised within broader national and international network and funding structures of transfer and cooperation projects.

In total, 47 projects from Switzerland were submitted via the questionnaire. Of these, 24 originated from universities of applied sciences, 15 from universities and 8 from universities of teacher education. In terms of linguistic regions, 37 projects were located in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, 3 in the French-speaking region, and 7 in the Italian-speaking region. This distribution reflects a strong representation of German-speaking institutions, whilst also ensuring participation from all major linguistic regions of the country. The questionnaire included single-choice, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions addressing, amongst other topics, practice partners, project approaches, project descriptions, and sustainability-related objectives in research and teaching.

The projects highlighted in Chapter 5 and 6 of this report were selected based on their relevance to transfer, cooperation, and sustainability transformation processes within and outside higher education institutions. Particular attention was given to initiatives connected to the 'Third Mission' of universities, which is commonly understood as the third core function of higher education institutions alongside teaching and research. The Third Mission encompasses interactions between universities and external societal actors that address societal needs and extend beyond traditional academic responsibilities, including knowledge transfer, continuing education, and societal engagement.

Research-related projects were included if they addressed sustainability challenges through innovative and socially responsible approaches. Given the growing expectation that research should contribute not only to knowledge production but also to practical solutions for complex societal issues, particular consideration was given to projects integrating ethical reflection, transdisciplinary collaboration, and sustainability-oriented research practices.

In the area of teaching, projects focusing on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) were considered particularly relevant. ESD promotes the integration of sustainability-related topics, principles, and practice-oriented teaching and learning methods into higher education curricula.

3. Support structures for transfer and cooperation projects in Switzerland

3.1. National support structures

In Switzerland, transfer and cooperation projects for sustainable development are supported by various bodies:

- Through the **Sustainability Research Initiative**, the Swiss **Academies** promote research projects with information, events and tools. However, the initiative is not limited to research in transfer and cooperation projects.
- The Swiss **Academies of Sciences** (SCNAT) run the **Network for Transdisciplinary Research (td-net)**, which promotes transdisciplinary research in Switzerland through similar services. This research often focuses on sustainability-related issues and, in some cases, utilises knowledge transfer and collaboration projects.
- Among the recently completed and current **National Research Programmes (NRPs)**, there are several with significant relevance to sustainability. An increasing number of programmes and funded research projects are transdisciplinary in nature, involving partners from the field.
- At Innosuisse, a practical focus and partnerships with stakeholders are central to its mission. Although no specific thematic priorities are set, the current multi-year programme (**Publication**) emphasises the importance of the cross-cutting theme of sustainable development.
- Three years ago, swissuniversities established a funding pot to promote a culture of sustainability at Swiss universities. Individual projects also include transfer and cooperation elements (**Supported Projects 2025 – swissuniversities**).

Conclusion: Switzerland has funding mechanisms for knowledge transfer and collaboration projects aimed at promoting the transition to sustainability, but compared to other European countries (e.g., Germany), these mechanisms are not very well developed.

3.2. Support structures in universities

At some universities, units have been established to promote research and teaching in the field of sustainability and/or for transdisciplinary transfer and cooperation projects. The most important are:

- **ETH Zurich:** The **Transdisciplinarity Lab (USYS TdLab)** at the Department of Environmental Systems Science conducts research and teaching specifically at the interface between science and social practice in order to address controversies surrounding sustainability.
- **University of Bern:** The **Centre for Development and Environment (CDE)** is a centre of excellence for sustainable development. It combines scientific research with inter- and transdisciplinary approaches and focuses on North-South partnerships. In addition, the **Engaged UniBE** programme supports transdisciplinary projects that involve local stakeholders.
- **University of Zurich (UZH):** The **Competence Centre for Sustainability** focuses on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research (including in sustainable finance) and the transfer of academic knowledge to the general public.
- **University of Lausanne (UNIL):** The **Competence Centre in Sustainability (CCD)** supports researchers, students and society in ecological and social transformation processes.

3.3. Structures involving cooperation between several universities

In recent years, a number of centres of excellence have been launched involving several universities:

The **Zurich Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development (ZKSD)** is a joint platform of **UZH, ZHAW, PHZH and ZHdK**. It pools the knowledge of these institutions to make it usable for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **EPFL**, the **University of Lausanne** and **IMD** have jointly founded the **E4S – Enterprise for Society Centre**, which focuses on the areas of Responsible Management, Sustainable Technology and Shared Prosperity. The **St. Gallen Transformation Lab** supports the development and implementation of innovative and sustainable visions for the future in the region. It is supported by the **University of St. Gallen** and the **University of Applied Sciences of Eastern Switzerland**.

4. Overview of projects: quantitative and qualitative results

This section presents selected quantitative findings from the questionnaire. As the questionnaire was not designed to yield representative results, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of patterns and tendencies within the submitted projects rather than as a basis for statistical generalisation. Nevertheless, they offer valuable insight into the characteristics of the surveyed initiatives and highlight key trends emerging from the dataset. The questions and the overview of the responses can be found in the appendix. Personal and sensitive data are not disclosed for data protection reasons.

Prior to the presentation of the quantitative results, it is important to note the following clarification. Research alliances and collaborative networks are knowledge exchange formats, that were not predefined as a distinct category in our questionnaire and research. Nonetheless, they are mentioned in this chapter due to their significant share of projects submitted in the questionnaire. In total, 12 such transfer projects were submitted.

Research alliances are a crucial precondition for enabling transformative processes. These initiatives are primarily aimed at identifying and developing effective structures, formats, and platforms that facilitate exchange and collaboration between academic institutions and external stakeholders. Whilst such activities do not necessarily contribute to sustainability transformations, they create physical and non-physical spaces in which diverse stakeholder groups come together to explore and experiment with effective forms of collaboration. By fostering knowledge exchange, research networks can strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration and may generate innovative project ideas. According to the projects submitted in the questionnaire, these exchange networks involve external practice partners like local authorities and cantonal authorities, companies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other societal actors.

4.1. Research areas

The first figure illustrates the thematic areas addressed by the submitted projects. Within the survey, participants were invited to describe the substantive focus of their projects in an open-ended format, without predefined categories or thematic priorities. This approach was intended to enable respondents to characterise their projects as freely and precisely as possible.

To provide a clearer overview of the project landscape, the research team subsequently developed thematic categories based on the responses received. As these categories were derived inductively, individual projects may be represented within more than one thematic area.

Prominent thematic areas include transformative education, food and agriculture, and sustainable living. By contrast, topics such as decarbonisation, biodiversity, mobility, and social equality were less frequently represented among the submitted projects.

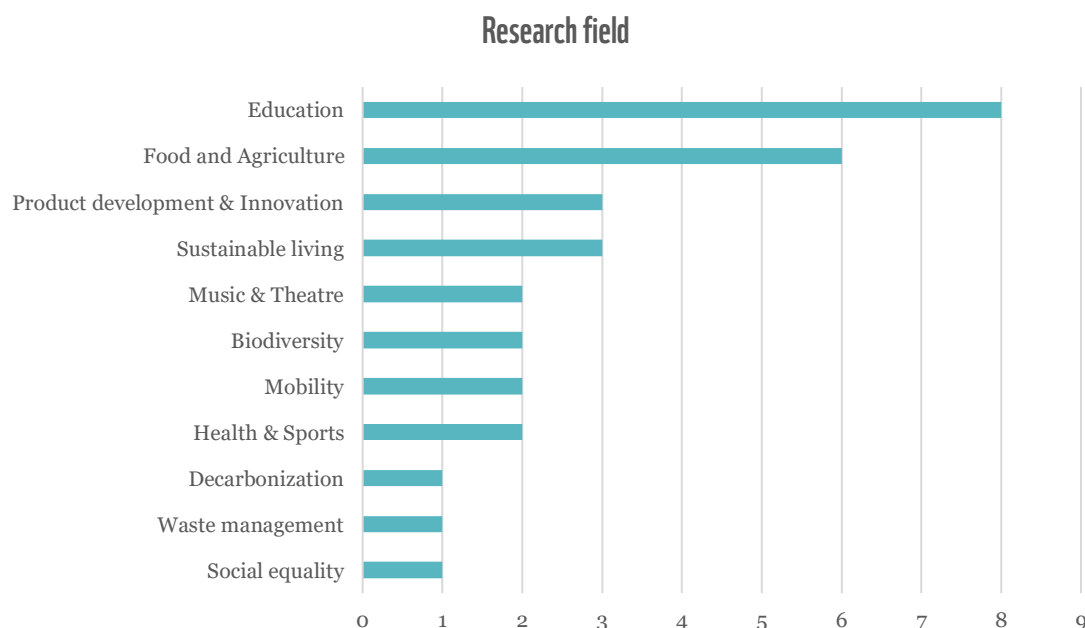


Figure 5: Fields of research of the submitted projects.

4.2. Research methods

Most respondents identified real-world experiments and living labs as their primary research approaches, closely followed by real-world laboratories. A considerable number also reported using other applied research methods. Frequently mentioned approaches included survey research, qualitative interviews, Participatory Action Research (PAR) and mixed-methods designs. Respondents also referred to complementary methods such as the evidence-based development of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) programmes for stakeholders, action research, open innovation, real-world case challenges and reflection workshops.

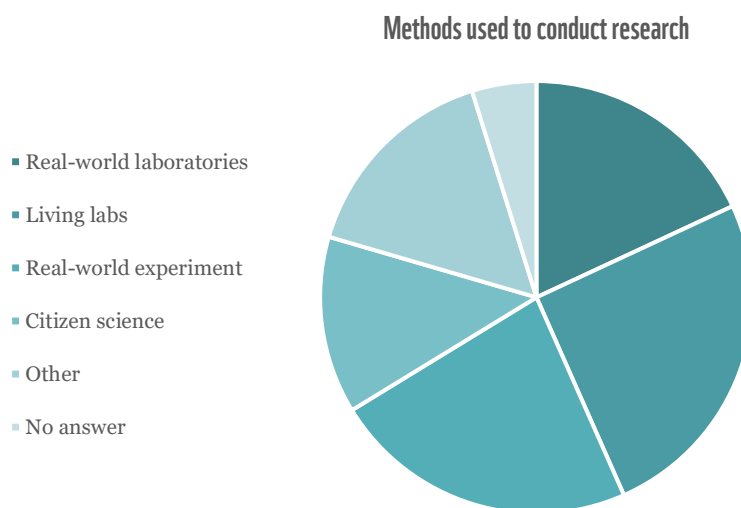


Figure 6: Multiple choice question on methods used to conduct research.

4.3. Teaching and learning methods

The survey also examined the methods used to foster transdisciplinary learning among students. Project-Based Learning (PBL) emerged as the most frequently reported approach across the surveyed transfer projects. Learning Living Labs and Problem-Based Learning were likewise commonly employed, underscoring the importance of experiential, collaborative, and practice-oriented learning environments within transdisciplinary education.

Service Learning and Design Thinking were mentioned less frequently. Under the category “Other”, respondents described a broad range of additional pedagogical and methodological approaches, including network-based exchange and collaboration, digital self-learning pathways for ESD, Challenge-Based Learning, Design-Based Research, immersive virtual reality-supported gamified learning, video-based case work, experiential and practice-based learning, workshop and training formats, participatory and co-creative methods, arts-based approaches, peer learning, and future workshops. Taken together, these responses indicate that the surveyed projects rely heavily on active, participatory and practice-oriented learning formats.

Method used to conduct the transdisciplinary learning project for students

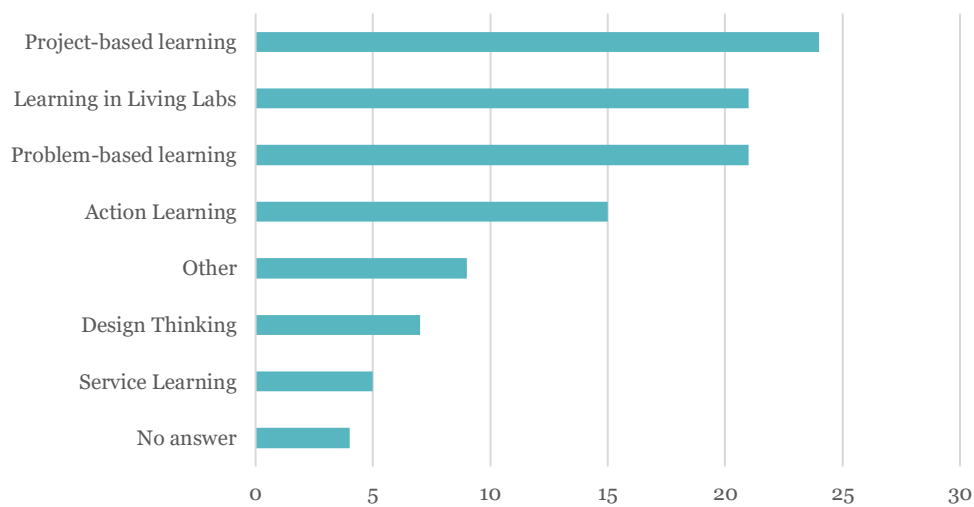


Figure 7: Multiple choice question on methods used to conduct the transdisciplinary learning project for students.

4.4. Project resources and duration

Another noteworthy finding concerns the financial requirements of the projects. Most respondents reported minimum budgets of CHF 10,000 or more, and several projects exceeded CHF 100,000. As the survey collected budget data in predefined ranges rather than as exact figures or detailed cost breakdowns, these findings should be interpreted as broad indications rather than precise financial estimates. Project duration appears to be closely related to these resource requirements. Approximately two-thirds of the submitted projects were reported to run for between two and four years, and most respondents indicated that transformation-oriented projects typically extend over several years rather than being confined to a single semester or to a period of less than one year. This finding underscores the long-term nature of many transformation projects and suggests that their duration contributes to the comparatively high levels of financial and human resources required for implementation.

Total budget (including staff costs)

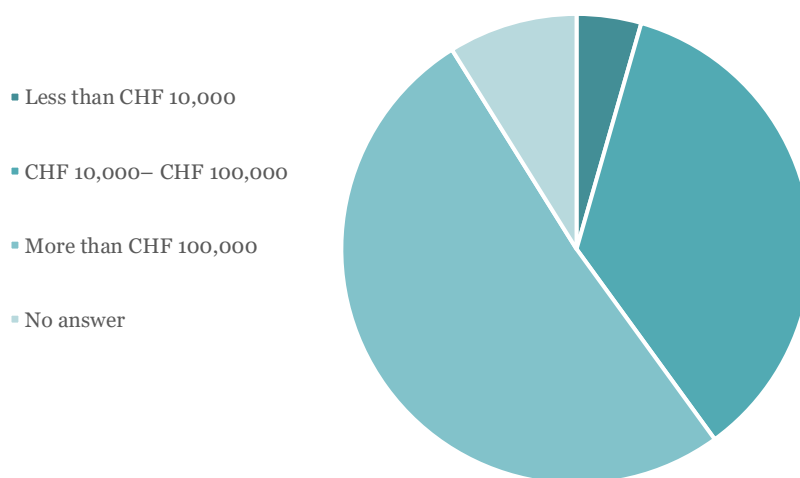


Figure 8: Multiple choice question on the total included budget for the respective transfer projects.

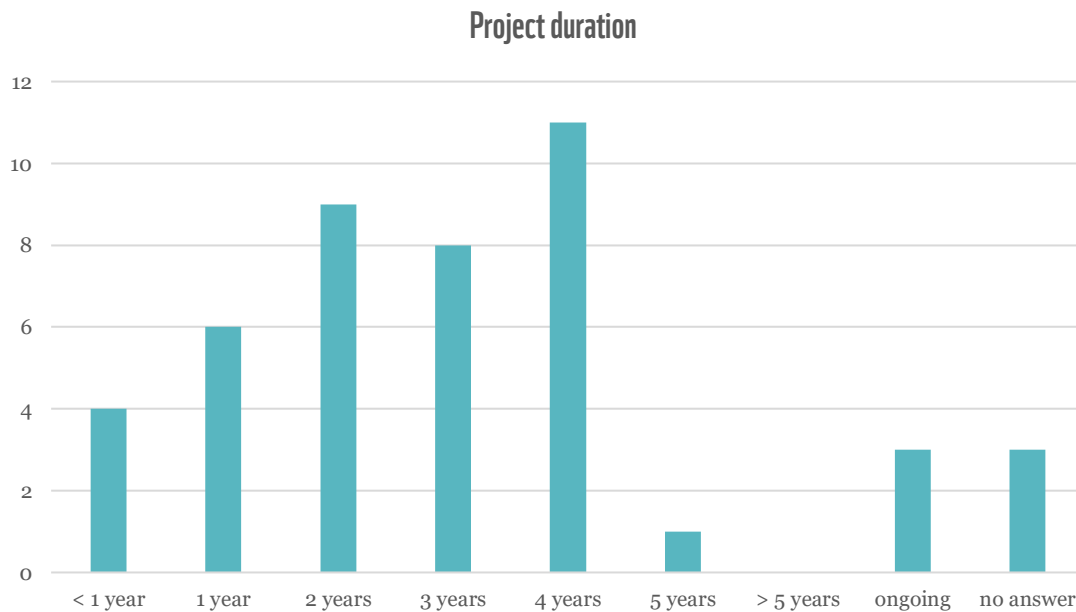


Figure 9: Estimated or realised project duration.

4.5. Assessment of qualitative results

In addition to the quantitatively assessed results, the open-ended questions included in the questionnaire provided valuable qualitative insights. The responses covered several thematic areas, including project descriptions, methods applied to foster transdisciplinary learning among students, research objectives, and contributions to sustainability transformation.

Regarding the methods used to facilitate transdisciplinary learning, a substantial degree of thematic overlap emerged across the responses. Many projects use real-world challenges to enable students to apply theory to complex, practice-relevant problems independently. A key objective is to develop students' ability to design sustainable solutions through scenario building and to adapt their approaches to different stakeholder realities and perspectives. The majority of responses highlighted the importance of integrating scientific, practical and experiential forms of knowledge in order to strengthen students' capacity to act as adaptive professionals in complex transformation processes. Particular emphasis was placed on the application of leadership, negotiation and decision-making methods, as well as on collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, especially within the context of group work. Moreover, students' ability to communicate and justify research findings to both academic and professional audiences may significantly improve.

Furthermore, respondents frequently emphasised the importance of reflective reasoning and the ability to critically evaluate sustainability challenges from multiple perspectives. In this context, the development of key life skills is considered essential. These included self-awareness, effective communication, tolerance for ambiguity, resilience and the capacity to operate in uncertain situations.

Particularly noteworthy were objectives related to experiential and intergenerational learning. Additionally, one project aimed to foster a hands-on understanding of ecosystem dynamics by enabling students to explore the interactions between living organisms, environmental factors, and ecological processes. This approach supports the recognition of fundamental flows and interdependencies within socio-ecological systems.

With regard to the research objectives of the transfer and cooperation projects, the responses revealed a strong emphasis on generating scientifically robust insights that contribute to academic knowledge production. Most frequently mentioned were the development of new analytical perspectives on sustainability-related issues. Some projects aim to produce actionable frameworks and evidence-based recommendations that enable partner organisations to make measurable progress in addressing sustainability challenges within their specific operational contexts. Beyond immediate project outcomes, respondents highlighted the importance of creating models and approaches that can be replicated and adapted in other settings. Beyond these scientific objectives, the projects explore the role of higher education institutions as enablers and agents of societal transformation. Attention is particularly given to understanding how research infrastructures, institutional resources, and collaborative formats can support

sustainability transitions within and beyond universities. In this context, the projects aim to strengthen participation and contribute to the development of a broader culture of sustainability within higher education institutions. Furthermore, survey responses suggest that transfer and cooperation projects contribute to sustainability transformation in multiple and interconnected ways. A central objective is the generation of tangible societal impact through the development and implementation of practical solutions to sustainability challenges. Examples include initiatives supporting the transition towards a circular economy in the Bern region by 2030, the integration of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into educational programmes, and a project promoting the social and economic empowerment of women. One respondent emphasised that sustainability transformation should be grounded in democratic values and human rights whilst fostering sustainability-related attitudes and agency at the individual level.

Many projects aim to produce actionable frameworks and evidence-based recommendations that enable partner organisations to make measurable progress in addressing sustainability challenges within their specific operational contexts.

Finally, recurring topic across the responses is the importance of co-creative and long-term transformation processes. Besides focusing solely on technical solutions, some projects aim to bring together residents, employees, researchers, students and other local stakeholders to jointly develop, test, refine and institutionalise sustainability-oriented solutions. This collaborative approach facilitates the exchange of knowledge and perspectives and strengthens the capacity of all participants to engage with complex sustainability challenges. Students, in particular, benefit from opportunities to apply their knowledge in real world contexts and transfer newly acquired skills into their future professional practice.



5. Short profiles of selected projects in Switzerland

The projects included in this analysis cover a broad range of thematic fields, including finance, decarbonisation, energy transition, the circular economy and sustainable materials, biodiversity, sufficiency, food and agriculture, water management, climate adaptation, as well as initiatives focusing on collaborative living, working, and community spaces. Additional areas of focus include social sustainability in farming, the promotion of sustainable regional diets, and efforts to strengthen biodiversity literacy within compulsory education.

Methodologically, the projects employ a variety of approaches, most notably real-world laboratories, joint initiatives, and research-based educational programmes. They are embedded in diverse institutional contexts, including ETH Zurich, the University of Lausanne (UNIL), École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH), and the University of Teacher Education Bern (PH Bern), thereby representing both German- and French-speaking regions of Switzerland.

The selection of projects was guided by the aim of capturing a broad spectrum of thematic areas, institutional formats, and organisational scales. In particular, the projects differ with regard to their duration, resource intensity, and structural setup. As such, the sample is intended to reflect the diversity of existing transfer and cooperation formats in higher education and to illustrate the range of possible approaches to sustainability-oriented teaching, research, and societal engagement.

5.1. Real-World Laboratory Jurapark Aargau

Jurapark Aargau is a regional nature park of national importance in Switzerland. Organised as an association, it collaborates closely with local authorities and a wide range of stakeholders to promote sustainable regional development. The park connects habitats and brings people together through cooperative initiatives and partnerships. Its mission is to preserve and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage whilst strengthening the regional economy and contributing to a high quality of life for local communities.



Image 1: Learning in the fresh air – the forest classroom in Densbüren. (Photo: Yuri Schmid)

Within this context, the Real-World Laboratory Jurapark Aargau brings together residents, practitioners, and researchers from institutions across the ETH-Domain to develop and test solutions for sustainable regional development. The Real-World Lab Jurapark Aargau is a joint initiative led by ETH Zurich and the Swiss Federal Research Institute WSL in close collaboration with Jurapark Aargau and a range of regional, national partners and national research institutes. Running until the end of 2026, the initiative focuses on real-world experiments in water management, climate adaptation, and circular economy.

Since the launch of the Real-World Lab Jurapark Aargau in 2023, participants from research and practice have jointly developed and run experimental projects through workshops and co-creation processes. A central principle of the initiative has been the integration of diverse perspectives and the identification of topics that are relevant to both researchers and local stakeholders.¹

The TdLab at ETH Zurich, one of the initiators of the Real-world Lab, pursues a two-pronged educational approach to transdisciplinary learning: students learn within transdisciplinary settings and learn about transdisciplinarity as a research approach. This includes developing an understanding of the methods, principles, and assumptions that underpin transdisciplinary research and collaboration with societal stakeholders. The TdLab seeks to foster an open and collaborative learning environment in which students are encouraged to contribute ideas, take the initiative, and engage directly with real-world challenges. Learning takes place through teamwork, interaction with stakeholders, and hands-on experience in practice-oriented settings.²

A particularly illustrative example of student involvement emerged through the real-world experiment ‘Green Spaces for the Future’. Over a period of one year, primary school students from Densbüren collaborated with architecture students from ETH Zurich to explore how climate adaptation can be made tangible through further developing an existing forest-classroom. Together, they designed and built a modular furniture for the forest, which was presented to the public in spring 2026. The new furniture for the forest-classroom is also attracting interest from other schools and authorities, illustrating how transdisciplinary collaboration can generate tangible outcomes whilst creating meaningful learning opportunities for students.³

Beyond its involvement in the Real-World Lab Jurapark Aargau, the TdLab at ETH Zurich participates in a range of similar transdisciplinary initiatives across Switzerland. These include projects addressing environmental challenges, living labs, and transdisciplinary case studies, all of which provide students with opportunities to contribute to sustainability transformations whilst developing practical and collaborative problem-solving skills.⁴



Image 2: ETH Professor Momoyo Kaijima examines the trellis with two of her students. (Photo: Yuri Schmid)

¹ <https://jurapark-aargau.ch/reallabor>

² <https://tdlab.usys.ethz.ch/de/bildung.html>

³ <https://www.fricktal.info/news/gemeinden/densbueren/reallabor-jurapark-aargau-in-densbueren-was-fuer-ein-cooles-schulzimmer.html>

⁴ <https://tdlab.usys.ethz.ch/de/bildung.html>

5.2. The Enterprise for Society Centre (E4S)

E4S is a joint initiative of the University of Lausanne (UNIL), the Institute for Management Development (IMD), and the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). By bringing together expertise from business, management, engineering and sustainability, E4S seeks to accelerate the transition towards a resilient, inclusive and sustainable economy that operates within planetary boundaries.

E4S pursues its mission through three interconnected pillars: interdisciplinary research, education and societal engagement. A key educational initiative is the Master of Science in Sustainable Management and Technology, jointly offered by UNIL, IMD, and EPFL. The programme equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to address complex sustainability challenges through interdisciplinary collaboration and real-world problem solving.⁵ The E4S Transformative Projects course provides students with the opportunity to tackle sustainability challenges at the intersection of technology, management and sustainability. Over a period of three months, interdisciplinary teams of three to four students collaborate with industry partners to develop innovative solutions with the potential to transform business practices. The external partners span a wide range of sustainability-related sectors, including finance, decarbonisation, energy transition, circular economy and materials, biodiversity, sufficiency and food and agriculture. The programme is run on a regular basis and is offered annually, enabling a continuous exchange between academia and industry.⁶

As part of the Master's programme in Sustainable Management and Technology, students collaborated with Romande Energie Services (RES) to address a real-world challenge related to the decarbonisation of Switzerland's building sector. During a three-month collaboration, the student team worked closely with RES to develop recommendations aimed at strengthening the company's contribution to regional decarbonisation efforts. The project focused on three key areas: integrating sustainability into the company culture, enhancing procurement and supplier management practices, and improving sustainability performance measurement. In addition, the team proposed a new analytical tool and strategies for more proactive customer engagement.

The resulting recommendations were consolidated into a strategic five-year roadmap for RES. By combining organisational, operational and market-oriented measures, the plan provides a framework for strengthening the company's sustainability performance and accelerating the decarbonisation of the Romandie region.⁷



⁵ <https://e4s.center/about-e4s/>

⁶ <https://e4s.center/transformative-projects/>

⁷ <https://e4s.center/transformative-project/romandie-energie-services-towards-a-decarbonized-romandie-a-strategic-plan/>

5.3. Urban Future Lab Webergut

The Urban Future Lab is a real-world laboratory based at the Webergut site in Zollikofen, Switzerland. A vacant office building is being transformed into a collaborative living, working and community space. Researchers from Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH) work with future residents and local stakeholders to co-develop sustainable approaches to housing and food systems.

A key objective is to build a local food community that integrates sustainable consumption and production into everyday life. Planned activities include food-growing spaces within the building, edible landscapes based on permaculture principles, collaboration with local farmers and producers, shared purchasing and storage systems and the promotion of sustainable dietary practices.⁸

The project is supported by the BFH research groups “Sustainable Food Systems” at the School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (BFH-HAFL) and the Institute for Urbanism, Architecture and Construction at the Department of Architecture, Wood and Civil Engineering (BFH-AHB), and the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE).

As part of the broader Urban Future Lab, it explores how sustainable lifestyles can be fostered within ecological limits, particularly in relation to housing and food consumption. Through the active involvement of future residents throughout planning and implementation, the project provides a practical example of co-creative and transdisciplinary urban development and tests new forms of community-based living. Beyond its local context, the project is intended to generate practical knowledge that can inform similar initiatives elsewhere.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a central method in the Urban Future Lab. It involves researchers working collaboratively with participants to co-produce knowledge and develop solutions in practice. In addition, the project uses methods such as social prototyping, photo diaries, workshops, architectural psychology and community-building formats to identify needs and co-create sustainable solutions. This collaborative approach ensures that the results remain practice-oriented and relevant. Experimental outputs include a community food store, permaculture areas and a shared kitchen, all of which contribute to the development of a transferable model for socially just and ecologically sustainable neighbourhood. Depending on the semester, approximately 20 to 30 students participate in the project. The teaching objectives include the development of:

- competence in transdisciplinary collaboration;
- skills in qualitative, participatory and co-creative methods;
- an understanding of planetary boundaries and consumption corridors;
- reflective capacities regarding social practices, routines and sustainability.



⁸ <https://www.bfh.ch/de/aktuell/news/2022/urban-future-lab/>



Image 3-5: The renovation work is scheduled to be completed in 2028. (source: images provided by the project lead)

5.4. CEDD-Agro-Eco-Clim

The CEDD-Agro-Eco-Clim is a collaborative initiative between the University of Neuchâtel and the Fondation rurale interjurassienne, involving additional stakeholders such as individual farmers, farmers' associations, and cantonal authorities. Functioning as an umbrella framework for a range of more specific projects, it places the active involvement of practice partners at the centre of its approach. Its overarching aim is to support the development of sustainable agroecological farming systems in the Jura region through participatory and transdisciplinary collaboration with farmers. The initiative has so far addressed fields of action including soil health, domestic and wild pollinators, agroforestry, climate adaptation and mitigation, social sustainability in farming, and the promotion of sustainable regional diets.⁹

From a research perspective, the project seeks to advance an interdisciplinary understanding of the transformations required for agricultural transition, with specific attention to issues such as soil biodiversity, governance mechanisms, and social acceptability. Research is conducted through various methods, including living labs, real-world experiments and citizen science.



Image 6-7: Project participants discuss common topics and learn from one another. (source: [Le CEDD-Agro-Eco-Clim](#))

To date, around 40 students have participated in the initiative through the annual seminar 'Agriculture, Climate and Transdisciplinarity', as well as through Master's and PhD theses and internships in the fields of agricultural sustainability and biodiversity conservation. The seminar constitutes a key interface between teaching and research, as it integrates students directly into the ongoing activities of CEDD-Agro-Eco-Clim for the duration of one semester. The course is designed to familiarise students with the challenges of conducting socially embedded and methodologically plural research in the context of agricultural and climate-related transformation.

In the 2025–2026 edition, students are asked to develop a collective survey exploring how farmers perceive and describe climate change and how these perceptions relate to their agricultural activities. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which farmers interpret ongoing environmental change, the challenges they associate with it, and the adaptation measures they have already implemented or are considering for the future. This empirical work is embedded in the Climagriculture project, a resource-oriented initiative scheduled to begin in 2026. Through their involvement, students contribute to the integration of social science perspectives into a broader transdisciplinary research setting in collaboration with practitioners.

Working in small groups, students conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with project stakeholders and may supplement these with observational elements where appropriate. They subsequently analyse the material on the basis of selected theoretical frameworks introduced in the course. Thereby, students gain insights into how qualitative social science methods can be applied within transdisciplinary sustainability research. The results of this process are ultimately presented to the management team of the Climagriculture project.¹⁰

⁹ <https://www.unine.ch/recherche/cedd-agro-eco-clim/>

¹⁰ <https://www.unine.ch/maps/fdd/enseignement/>

5.5. Change Through Education? How Teachers Can Transform Societal Perception of Biodiversity

Biodiversity loss is one of the defining environmental challenges of the 21st century, with far-reaching consequences for ecosystem stability, food security and societal well-being. Despite its importance, biodiversity often remains an abstract concept for many citizens, including school pupils and teachers. To address this issue, an alliance of Swiss universities of teacher education, biodiversity researchers, schools and GLOBE Switzerland is developing a research-based educational programme aimed at strengthening biodiversity literacy across compulsory education. The overarching goal is to cultivate a profound and lasting understanding of biodiversity among pupils, fostering critical reflection on individual attitudes and behaviours.

Over the course of four years, the project adopts a transdisciplinary approach that combines the expertise of educational scientists, biodiversity researchers, policymakers, teacher educators, schools and civil society actors. Eleven Swiss universities of teacher education are collaborating with a sounding board comprising biodiversity experts and key stakeholders, including representatives from the Federal Office for the Environment, the University of Bern, the Swiss Academy of Sciences, the Natural History Museum Basel, as well as practising teachers and teacher educators. Together, these partners translate current biodiversity research into educational practice. Through iterative co-design processes, they develop learning arrangements, teaching materials and teacher-training concepts across all levels of compulsory education.

The project pursues both educational and research objectives. From an educational perspective, the project aims to develop a progressive curriculum pathway that begins in primary school and extends throughout compulsory education. Aligned with Curriculum 21, this pathway combines classroom-based and outdoor learning experiences, enabling students to develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of biodiversity, its measurement, its ecological functions, and its relevance to society.

A central objective is the development of a competency framework that defines age-appropriate learning goals for all stages of compulsory education. Based on these student competencies, corresponding teacher competencies are identified to ensure effective and scientifically accurate teaching. Ultimately, the initiative aims to deepen biodiversity literacy whilst laying the foundation for informed societal and political participation.

Accordingly, the research objectives are:

- To generate empirical insights into biodiversity-related competencies, attitudes and behavioural intentions among both teachers and students.
- To produce scientific evidence regarding the effectiveness of teacher training and curricular interventions in improving biodiversity-related learning outcomes.
- To investigate how systematically designed teacher education programmes contribute to the development of students' biodiversity competencies and attitudes.

The research framework incorporates Living Labs and real-world experiments to investigate learning processes and educational impact under authentic conditions.

The evaluation will take place in two stages. First, the effectiveness of the newly developed teacher training programme will be assessed among approximately 400–600 pre-service students enrolled at participating teacher training universities. Second, the impact of biodiversity lessons delivered by these trained pre-service teachers will be examined among approximately 900 compulsory school pupils. Learning outcomes will be compared with those achieved in classrooms taught by untrained pre-service teachers, allowing for a rigorous evaluation of the training programme's effectiveness.

The educational design draws on established approaches to transdisciplinary learning, including Problem-Based Learning, Action Learning, and Learning in Living Labs.¹¹

To ensure long-term impact, GLOBE Switzerland will coordinate dissemination activities, maintain an open online repository, and establish a Biodiversity Literacy Monitor that continuously feeds research findings back into teacher education, educational practice, and policy development.

¹¹ <https://www.nfp82.ch/en/APa83ly7OBLKXSNt/project/advancing-biodiversity-literacy-through-education>

6. Short profiles of selected projects in Europe

In this chapter, the projects selected take us to Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. From real-world laboratories and a living lab to the ‘Green Village’, the projects explore transformational processes in the areas of sustainable urban living, energy use, forest management, material efficiency and mobility. We selected projects initiated by peer universities across Europe in the field of sustainability transfer, alongside other relevant criteria like project durations and resources. These projects operate at different scales and illustrate the diverse opportunities that European transfer projects offer for both local and international collaboration. They may serve as inspiration for universities and higher education institutions, including those in Switzerland, seeking to develop and strengthen similar forms of cooperation.

6.1. Quartier Zukunft

"Quartier Zukunft – Labor Stadt" is a real-world laboratory established by the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) in Germany that promotes sustainable urban transformation through transdisciplinary collaboration. The initiative seeks to explore how high-quality urban living can be achieved whilst respecting environmental integrity, social responsibility, and intergenerational justice. Rather than pursuing large-scale redevelopment, the project focuses on the gradual transformation of an existing urban neighbourhood through cooperation among citizens, researchers, policymakers, businesses, and civil society actors.

Functioning as both an experimental platform and a research environment, the project supports the development, testing, and implementation of innovative sustainability solutions. It places particular emphasis on creating new forms of quality of life and fostering a culture of sustainability that becomes embedded in everyday practices, values, and decision-making processes. Local residents, organisations, schools, and businesses act as key agents of change by initiating and implementing their own sustainability projects, whilst the scientific team facilitates, coordinates, and evaluates these processes.

The project adopts an integrated and systemic perspective on urban sustainability, addressing interconnected domains such as consumption, work, education, mobility, and food systems. Through transdisciplinary methods, it brings together diverse forms of expertise and stakeholder perspectives to co-create knowledge and identify solutions to complex sustainability challenges. The Karlsruhe Oststadt serves as a model neighbourhood for experimenting with sustainable urban development and generating transferable insights for other European urban contexts.

Conceptually, the initiative is grounded in the United Nations’ vision of sustainable development and is informed by the Integrative Concept of Sustainable Development developed at the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS).¹² Since 2022, the Karlsruhe Transformation Centre for Sustainability and Cultural Change (KAT) has been providing an institutional framework for the Quartier Zukunft real-world laboratory and has further expanded its activities. KAT’s core mission encompasses innovation, research, education, consultancy and critical reflection. In response to increasingly complex and fast-paced societal dynamics, the centre also creates spaces for reflection, contemplation and intellectual retreat, serving as a refuge for pioneers of sustainability transformation. Central principles of its work include fostering resonance, mindfulness and a deliberate slowing down of processes to enable deeper engagement with transformative change.

In addition to its outward-facing activities, KAT explicitly promotes an “inner culture of sustainability.” The centre seeks to align its internal organisational practices with the sustainability values and objectives it advocates externally.¹³

Students are integrated into the Quartier Zukunft real-world laboratory through teaching, research, and practical engagement activities. The initiative is closely linked to higher education and serves as a learning environment where students can participate in transdisciplinary sustainability projects, collaborate with societal stakeholders, and apply academic knowledge to real-world challenges. Through project work, workshops, research activities, and student assistant positions, participants gain practical experience in sustainability transformation processes whilst developing competencies in collaboration, reflection, and problem-solving.¹⁴

¹² <https://www.quartierzukunft.de/konzept.php>

¹³ <https://www.quartierzukunft.de/kat.php>

¹⁴ https://www.itas.kit.edu/english/projects_paro15_qzrealab.php

6.2. Green Village TU Delft - 'Prêt-à-Loger'

The Green Village serves as a real-world experimental environment for the development of future-oriented forms of sustainable living, tested under real-life conditions before being applied to wider contexts. Located on the campus of Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) in the Netherlands, it functions as a small-scale neighbourhood in which researchers, students, start-ups, public authorities and residents collaboratively explore innovative solutions in the fields of energy, housing, mobility, water and sustainable living prior to their wider implementation.

Unlike a conventional research laboratory, The Green Village is structured as a living lab. This means that people live and work within the environment, enabling innovations to be tested under everyday conditions rather than in controlled laboratory settings. Such an arrangement allows researchers to examine technological performance in practice, analyse user interaction, and assess the feasibility, safety, and scalability of proposed solutions.

One of the project's most distinctive features is its operation as a form of regulatory sandbox. Within this framework, selected building and infrastructure regulations may be temporarily relaxed, thereby permitting experimental systems and prototypes to be tested with greater flexibility than would otherwise be possible in the Netherlands. This arrangement creates opportunities to evaluate ideas that would normally be difficult or excessively risky to implement under standard regulatory conditions.

The Green Village was established in response to TU Delft's recognition that many promising innovations emerging from university research were not successfully translated into societal application. A gap persisted between laboratory-based research and real-world adoption. The Green Village seeks to address this gap by providing innovators with a setting in which technologies can be developed, validated, refined, and demonstrated under practical conditions.



Image 8-9: Impressions of the Green Village and the 'Prêt-à-Loger – Home with a skin'. (sources: [The Green Village - Stichting Goeie Grutten](#) and [Prêt-à-Loger eerste bewoner Green Village · STIP](#)).

One successful project created in the Green Village is the 'Prêt-à-Loger – Home with a skin'. A team of students from Delft University of Technology developed an energy-positive housing concept that generates more energy than it consumes. The project received international recognition through a prestigious sustainability competition.

Following this achievement, the house was installed at The Green Village, where it served as a full-scale demonstration and research facility. In this setting, researchers, industry partners and students were able to evaluate and further develop the building under real-life conditions.¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://www.tudelft.nl/innovatie-impact/home-of-innovation/special/the-green-village>

6.3. InnoForEST

The InnoForEST project by Eberswalde University of Applied Sciences in Germany investigated innovative approaches to the provision, governance, and financing of forest ecosystem services across Europe. Six successful case studies from biogeographically diverse regions of Europe have been scientifically monitored since November 2017, as part of the EU research project InnoForEST for a period of three years, with the aim of optimising or expanding forest ecosystems. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying the conditions, enabling factors, and institutional frameworks that foster innovation in forest ecosystem service governance, whilst simultaneously strengthening the transfer of knowledge between science, policy, and practice.

The project was embedded within a broader European research and innovation framework and brought together 16 partners from nine European countries. These partners represented a diverse range of stakeholder groups, including public administrations, forest management organisations, associations of landowners, non-governmental organisations, and academic institutions.

A central objective of the project was to explore how innovative governance mechanisms could better reflect and support the diversity of ecosystem services provided by forests. To this end, the consortium examined six practical case studies across Europe, including examples such as payment schemes and novel forms of stakeholder cooperation. These case studies served as experimental spaces in which innovation processes could be analysed, tested, and further developed within their specific regional contexts.¹⁶

The project followed the logic of an “Innovation Action” funding scheme, in which practical problems and the needs of societal actors formed the starting point of the research process. Scientific inquiry was therefore centred on real-world challenges and aimed at generating applicable and transferable knowledge. Within this framework, several work packages focused on the analysis of innovation pathways, governance structures, stakeholder interactions, and future development trajectories of forest ecosystem service provision.

Inter- and transdisciplinary research approaches played a central role throughout the project. In particular, the transfer of knowledge between academic and non-academic actors was considered essential within the context of socio-ecological research. Practice partners were not only integrated into the research process but were also systematically connected with additional stakeholders and interest groups, thereby fostering horizontal networking and long-term collaboration structures across regions and sectors.

The project further emphasised regional embeddedness and context-specific innovation dynamics. During the course of the project, innovation processes were increasingly shaped by emerging environmental crises and ecological disturbances, which created new challenges but also accelerated the search for adaptive governance solutions. The integration of research and teaching constituted another important dimension of the project. Approximately eight to ten students contributed to project-related activities, including data analysis, literature reviews, graphical visualisation, and Master’s theses. In addition, one of the project case studies was incorporated into university teaching as part of a module on innovation and transformation, where students critically engaged with questions of socio-ecological innovation and governance. The project continues to serve as a teaching case study within the university context, thereby extending its long-term educational and societal impact.



Image 10-11: Research environment of the InnoForEST: UNESCO Geopark Steirische Eisenwurzen, Austria. (source: [Home - InnoForEST](https://innoforest.eu/))

¹⁶ <https://innoforest.eu/>

6.4. Living Labs at the University of Sheffield

The Living Lab approach at the University of Sheffield serves as a mechanism for advancing sustainability transformation by connecting research, education, and societal engagement through real-world experimentation. Designed to facilitate the transition from small-scale campus pilots to broader implementation across the city of Sheffield and the wider South Yorkshire region, the Living Lab addresses challenges related to sustainability, including energy use, material efficiency, mobility, climate resilience, and community wellbeing. Projects are developed collaboratively through partnerships between academics, students, university staff, public sector organisations, community groups, and other regional stakeholders. Through iterative processes of co-design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, the Living Lab generates practical solutions that can be adapted and scaled beyond the university context.

A central feature of the model is the active integration of students into all stages of project development. Students participate through dissertations, placements, studio-based projects, and challenge-led learning formats, enabling them to apply disciplinary knowledge to complex societal challenges whilst developing research, collaboration, and professional competencies. Rather than acting solely as learners, students contribute as co-creators of knowledge and solutions within transdisciplinary partnerships.¹⁷

A particularly illustrative example of the University of Sheffield's Living Lab approach is the Climate Re-Assemblies Live Project, conducted in 2024 in South Yorkshire. The project brought together architecture students from the University of Sheffield, the Climate Re-Assemblies Research Group, the South Yorkshire Sustainability Centre, and the Upper Don Community Energy (UDCE) group to explore how spatial design can support civic engagement with climate policy. The initiative emerged in response to the limited implementation of recommendations developed by the South Yorkshire Citizens' Assembly on Climate (SYCAC) in 2023 and sought to sustain democratic dialogue around climate action at the local level.

Focusing on the Upper Don Valley as a peri-urban case study, students worked closely with community partners to map local social and environmental networks and identify opportunities for place-based climate engagement. The project resulted in the co-creation of an interactive public installation that communicated local climate realities and invited residents to contribute their own visions for the future through participatory design elements. This was complemented by a series of community events held at Penistone Market and the Christchurch Social Café in Stocksbridge, where local stakeholders collectively reflected on climate challenges and co-produced future pathways for action.

The project demonstrates how students can be actively integrated into transdisciplinary sustainability initiatives as researchers, designers, and facilitators of community engagement. Beyond its educational value, the project generated practical outputs, including a prototype tool for mapping local climate activism and a set of place-based engagement methods documented in the Placing Climate Policy report. By creating accessible and locally relevant spaces for climate dialogue, the initiative contributed to strengthening civic participation, supporting community-led climate action, and developing scalable approaches to climate governance that can be replicated in other peri-urban regions across South Yorkshire.¹⁸



Image 12. (source: *Live Projects - 24-25 12 Climate Re-Assemblies*).

¹⁷ <https://sheffield.ac.uk/sustainability/living-labs>

¹⁸ <https://www.liveprojects.org/archive/2024-2025/24-25-12-climate-re-assemblies>

7. Conclusions and recommendations

As outlined throughout this report, the overarching objective of transfer and cooperation projects is to facilitate collective learning among various stakeholders and support the development of innovative, effective and scalable solutions for sustainability transitions. The benefits and importance of involving societal actors in research processes and in the development of solutions have been demonstrated extensively. Such approaches foster long-term, co-creative transformation processes by bringing together researchers, students, practitioners and local stakeholders to jointly develop, test, refine and institutionalise sustainability-oriented solutions.

In line with the “Third Mission” of higher education institutions, transfer projects generate societal value through the co-development and implementation of practical solutions to sustainability challenges. The effectiveness of such projects is not primarily determined by their scale. Rather, their impact depends on the extent to which they contribute to addressing societal and environmental needs and create benefits that extend beyond academic outputs. In this regard, the establishment of effective networks for knowledge exchange between academic and non-academic actors represents a crucial precondition for successful transfer activities. A further important dimension of impact concerns the development of competencies among students, including systems thinking, collaborative problem-solving, transdisciplinary communication and the ability to engage with real-world sustainability challenges. These ‘Third-order impact’ projects therefore aim not only to advance scientific knowledge, but also to contribute meaningfully to societal transformation through the practical application of research outcomes. Based on our current review, most transfer and cooperation projects can be located within the categories of first-degree and second-order impacts. Therefore, the findings of this report suggest that considerable untapped potential remains.

In this context, the concept of co-production is particularly relevant. When higher education institutions address complex sustainability challenges through transfer activities, these challenges should be tackled collaboratively with practitioners and societal actors using scientific methods and expertise. This implies jointly designing and implementing transfer processes. All participants contribute their competencies, strengths, experiences and perspectives to shared learning and research processes. Collaborative perspectives should already be reflected in the initial framing of a project. A crucial point is whether the project is driven primarily by an academic research question or by a real-world sustainability challenge that requires practical solutions. Equally important is whether research and teaching activities remain confined to the institutional setting or whether they extend beyond the university whilst actively involving external stakeholders throughout the process. Furthermore, the evaluation and utilisation of project outcomes should consider whether results can be effectively translated into societal contexts and implemented in practice.

To fully realise the potential, higher education institutions must cultivate a strong mindset and culture of transfer and collaboration while simultaneously establishing the necessary institutional conditions. These include strategic frameworks, incentive and recognition systems, operational processes and structures, as well as adequate personnel and financial resources. Although organisational and structural conditions can only be influenced and transformed to a certain extent, efforts to strengthen transfer and cooperation processes can further develop the role of higher education institutions to act as enablers of sustainability transformations.

Finally, another key finding of this report concerns the integration of students. Although student involvement is recognised as an important element of transfer projects, both the questionnaire results and the online research suggest that students are often not at all or only partially integrated into project processes. Yet meaningful student participation is a core characteristic of successful transfer projects. Students contribute valuable perspectives, develop essential professional and personal competencies and build networks beyond academia. Innovative teaching and assessment formats can further strengthen their engagement and creativity and empower them to actively contribute to sustainability transformations.

To strengthen this development, there is a need for more exemplary projects that demonstrate how co-productive transfer processes can successfully contribute to sustainability transformations. Visible examples of impactful transfer and cooperation projects could provide valuable inspiration and help further embed collaborative approaches within higher education institutions and their engagement with society.

We recommend that universities, swissuniversities, and funding organizations:

1. **Strategy:** The development and implementation of a national third-mission strategy for the sustainability transition forms the basis for the third-mission strategies of individual universities.
2. **Framework conditions:** The expansion of funding structures, resources, and cross-university networks and collaboration enables effective transfer and cooperation projects for the transition to sustainability: Government support for such projects through research and innovation funding makes an important contribution to the transition to sustainability.
3. **Approaches and projects:** When transfer and cooperation projects identify a relevant sustainability challenge and seek, implement, evaluate, and refine solutions in an ambitious and scalable manner, there is a good chance of achieving a meaningful impact.
4. **Understanding of transfer:** Developing a culture of transfer at universities fosters understanding, motivation, and clarity regarding preferred transfer approaches. Where possible, practice partners are involved as early as the conceptual phase, and collaboration with them takes place on an equal footing. This facilitates a shared vision, learning processes for all participants and co-creation.
5. **Students:** By combining transfer and cooperation projects with practice-oriented modules, more students can be involved in these projects to a greater extent. This promotes the acquisition of practical knowledge and the development of skills. Student projects can harness students' potential and creativity.



Appendix

Projects Overview Switzerland

Higher education institution or research institute	Project name of the Transfer and Cooperation project	Link to project
Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH)	Allianz Kreislaufwirtschaft	https://www.klimaplattform.ch/kreislaufwirtschaft/kreislaufwirtschaft-bern
Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training (EHB)	Institutionelle Verankerung und Stärkung der BNE-Expertise durch Netzwerke für Dozierende.	https://www.swissuniversities.ch/themen/nachhaltigkeit/nachhaltigkeitskultur-2025-2028/unterstuetzte-projekte-2025
University of Education Zurich	Empowering Women and Youth in rural Egypt through Education and Economic Inclusion (EYRAD)	https://phzh.ch/en/about-phzh/topics-and-activities/projects/empowering-women-and-youth-in-rural-egypt-through-education-and-economic-inclusion/
University of Linneaus Sweden	Sustainable Leadership	https://phzh.ch/en/about-phzh/topics-and-activities/projects/sustainable-leadership/
University of Bern	Engaged Mittelstrasse	https://engaged.unibe.ch/what_we_do/projects_living_labs/engaged_mittelstrasse/index_eng.html
University of Basel	Sound of sustainability colloquium and student-led music fair	Currently there is no link but details will be published here: https://nachhaltigkeit.philhist.unibas.ch/en/
University of Bern	KliMoSpo - Für eine klimafreundliche Mobilität im Sportverein	https://engaged.unibe.ch/was_wir_tun/call_projekte_engaged/klimospo/index_ger.html
Swiss Distance University of Applied Sciences (FFHS)	Scientific and Innovation Hub	https://www.ffhs.ch/de/master/business-administration-in-sustainability-and-circular-innovation
University of Education Zurich	Gemeinsam bildungsgerechte und inklusionsorientierte Schulgemeinschaften gestalten	https://phzh.ch/ueber-die-phzh/themen-und-taetigkeiten/projekte/gemeinsam-bildungsgerechte-und-inklusionsorientierte-schulen-gestalten/
University of Fribourg	Sustainability in practice	https://www.unifr.ch/durabilite/fr/sustainability-in-practice/
University of Neuchâtel	CEDD-Agro-Eco-Clim	https://www.unine.ch/recherche/cedd-agro-eco-clim/
Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)	Living Lab: Food System Future Wädenswil	https://www.zhaw.ch/en/research/project/76996
University of Basel	Lecture Series Sustainability Assessment	https://vorlesungsverzeichnis.unibas.ch/de/vorlesungsverzeichnis?id=295695
Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)	Living Lab Lokstadt - langfristig lebenswert	https://livinglablokstadt.zhaw.ch/
Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)	WinLab Co-Creation Living Lab for sustainable city development and local innovation	https://enoll.org/member/winlab/
University of Bern	Verhaltenswirksame Massnahmen zu Förderung gesunder und nachhaltiger Ernährung bei Jugendlichen	https://engaged.unibe.ch/was_wir_tun/call_projekte_engaged/gesunde_und_nachhaltige_ernaehrung_von_jugendlichen/index_ger.html
Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH)	Vielfältiges Quartier für alle	https://www.bfh.ch/de/forschung/forschungsprojekte/2023-215-465-433/
Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH)	EcoArtLab	https://ecoartlab.ch/
Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)	360° (Elective module, Msc in Preneurship for Regenerative Food Systems)	See e.g. https://eventweb.zhaw.ch/Evt_Pages/Brn_ModulDetailAZ.aspx?node=c594e3e5-cd9a-4204-9a61-de1e43ccb7b0&IDAnlass=1854783 as well as

Higher education institution or research institute	Project name of the Transfer and Cooperation project	Link to project
		https://www.zhaw.ch/storage/lsm/studium/master-prefs/360-module-prefs-2025.pdf (summary of one element of the 2025 module)
Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)	Lebensraum Garten: Im Dialog mit der Natur – intergeneratives Gärtnern zur Förderung bio-psycho-sozialer und ökologischer Ressourcen	https://www.zhaw.ch/de/forschung/projekt/78894 sowie https://www.zhaw.ch/forschungsdaten/project-data/20251021202928_68f7d1085dcbf.pdf
University of Neuchâtel	Collaborative Community for Sustainability Mindset Education, Movetia (Soleure, CH) GRANT_NUMBER: Projet 2023-1-CH01-IP-0057	n.a.
University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)	Grooving to grow (G2G)	n.a.
Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training (EHB)	Sustain-a-Bite Bistro - where every bite matters	https://www.sfuveit.swiss/research/projects/sustain-bite-bistro-where-every-bite-matters-immersive-gamified-learning https://www.bfh.ch/en/research/research-projects/2025-209-297-301/ https://belearn.swiss/en/research-practice/projects/sustain-a-bite-bistro/
Università della Svizzera italiana (USI)	Positive Impact Research Market - Thesis	http://www.usi.ch/pirm-tesi
University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)	SUPSI transdisciplinary area - Transitions towards a low-carbon society	https://www.supsi.ch/en/transitions-towards-a-low-carbon-society A dedicated website is being designed
University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)	SPECIFIC - Specifying Practices Enabled by Cycling In Fifteen-minute Cities	https://www.15mcityspecific.org
Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH)	Bachelor Transformation Design	https://www.hkb.bfh.ch/en/studies/bachelor/transformation-design/
Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH)	“Urban Future Lab” – Real-World Laboratory Webergut, Zollikofen	Website “Urbane Dörfer” – Webergut: https://www.urbanedoefer.ch/projekte/zollikofen Project website (BFH-HAFL, in German): https://www.bfh.ch/de/aktuell/news/2022/urban-future-lab/ Project videos: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uy-GelrNyeVw ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uN2iL_Vawas&t=6s Video about the Webergut – Part 1: https://vimeo.com/990733442
Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH)	Future Urban Society	https://www.futureurbansociety.ch/
Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH)	BioPrint	https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/234986
University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)	Fiume Spazio Tempo	www.fiumespaziotempo.ch
University of Teacher Education Bern	Cognitive Activation and Transformative Learning in Geography Education – Professional Competency Development through Video-Based Case Work in Upper Secondary Teacher Education	https://www.phbern.ch/forschung/projekte/professionelle-kompetenzentwicklung-durch-videobasierte-fallarbeit-in-der-lehrpersonen-ausbildung

Higher education institution or research institute	Project name of the Transfer and Cooperation project	Link to project
		https://www.geography.unibe.ch/forschung/kritische_nachhaltigkeitsforschung/forschungsprojekte/kompetenzentwicklung_video-basierte_fallarbeits/index_ger.html
Bern University of Teacher Education (PHBern)	RealTransform - Stationen des Wandels	https://www.phbern.ch/ueber-die-phbern/bildung-fuer-nachhaltige-entwicklung/stationen-des-wandels-nachhaltigkeit-im-dialog
Accademia Teatro Dimitri, school affiliated to University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)	Preventing Harassment through Physical Theatre	https://www.accademiadimitri.ch/progetti-di-ricerca/prevenire-le-molestie-attraverso-il-teatro-fisico
University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)	Fiume Spazio Tempo	www.fiumespaziotempo.ch
Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH)	Cocoa Biochar : A triple impact solution	in preparation
University of Bern	UrbanLab Viererfeld	https://engaged.unibe.ch/was_wir_tun/call_projekte_engaged/urbanlab_viererfeld/index_ger.html
University of Teacher Education Bern	Change Through Education? How Teachers Can Transform Societal Perception of Biodiversity	https://www.nfp82.ch/en/APa83Iy7OBLKXSNT/project/advancing-biodiversity-literacy-through-education
University of Education Lucerne	CUFT-Teilprojekt 3 NE-Bildungslandschaften	https://www.swissuniversities.ch/themen/nachhaltigkeit/nachhaltigkeitskultur-2025-2028/unterstuetzte-projekte-2025
University of Education Lucerne	Reallabor Netto-Null	https://www.nachhaltigkeitskultur-campus-luzern.ch/leuchtturmprojekte/07-reallabor-netto-null.html
University of Education Lucerne	Fallarbeiten des Masterstudiengangs mit NGOs	https://www.phlu.ch/studium/studiengaenge/masterstudiengaenge-fachdidaktik/machdidaktik-nmg-ne.html
University of Basel	Challenge Lab, Training Course	n.a.
University of St. Gallen	Circular Lab	https://www.unisg.ch/de/forschung/forschung-im-fokus/circular-lab/
University of St. Gallen	St.Gallen Transformation Lab	Link 1) https://www.unisg.ch/en/university/engagement/responsibility-and-sustainability/societal-impact/
University of St. Gallen	Be the Change Course Series	Link 2) https://transformation-lab.co Course example: https://www.unisg.ch/en/newsdetail/news/hsg-students-instead-of-lecturers-lead-course-a-learning-community-is-created/
University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW)	Blockmodul "Nachhaltige Produktentwicklung"	https://www.fhnw.ch/de/studium/module/9826648

You can find the detailed answer sheet of the survey following this [link](#).

Survey Supplement

This content was sent to participating universities with the questionnaire as a survey supplement during data collection.

Broad understanding of sustainability and sustainable development

The terms sustainability and sustainable development are used interchangeably in this document and in the survey. For sustainable development the ecological, social and economic dimensions are important – with regard to local, national, regional and global circles as well as current and future generations. Furthermore, a broad understanding of sustainability encompasses technological, cultural, psychological and philosophical aspects and perspectives.

Strong sustainability

According to the concept of strong sustainability, the dimensions of sustainability mentioned above cannot be substituted: Planetary boundaries must be respected and the remaining stocks of "natural capital" must be preserved. On this basis, peaceful societies that are capable of learning and adapting can develop. An environment that is as intact as possible and a functioning society are prerequisites for a sustainable economy. This understanding of the interdependence of the three dimensions, ecology, economy and society is particularly relevant in the case of conflicting goals. Furthermore, the non-human environment ("nature") has an intrinsic value that goes beyond that of a mere "resource".

Sustainability transformation

To enable sustainable development, we need a fundamental transformation of the economy and of the individual sectors, which also requires major political and social changes. In the sustainability transformation, democratic, constitutional, and liberal principles as well as human rights and international law should be promoted or at least respected. At the individual level, the understanding of the necessity of sustainable development as well as the personal development of attitudes, ways of thinking, decision-making and further key competences compatible with sustainability are to be promoted.

Goal framework

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda 2030 (SDGs) specify the target areas of sustainable development - and thus the relevant topics and aspects.

Research

As one of the core functions of universities, research occupies a central position of attention and expectation. It is expected not only to generate knowledge about complex challenges but also to develop innovative solutions to them. Increasingly, research is called upon to assume responsibility for its activities and their broader societal implications. This includes integrating ethical reflection into the various stages of the research process. Given the diversity of challenges, topics, and methods involved, a systematic examination of how sustainable research can be achieved is therefore timely. Td-net and the Sustainability Research Initiative are the principal overarching institutions in this field.

Teaching: Education for Sustainable Development in Higher Education (ESD)

Education is indispensable for sustainable development. The concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) includes not only topics and content, but also principles as well as teaching/learning approaches and learning methods that promote a comprehensive understanding of sustainable development as well as sustainability-relevant decision-making competences. The consistent integration of sustainable development into the Bachelor's, Master's, doctoral and postgraduate education programmes in the sense of ESD includes a generalist, broad understanding of sustainability, an in-depth examination of the discipline-specific topics and aspects of sustainable development, as well as an increased use of practice-oriented teaching/learning methods that promote decision-making competence and reflection. Such a comprehensive programme revision is being discussed internationally under the term "curriculum change".

Third Mission in Higher Education Institutions

The Third Mission is commonly described as the third core function of universities alongside teaching and research. It refers to interactions between higher education institutions and external societal actors that address societal needs and extend beyond traditional academic responsibilities, including continuing education, knowledge transfer, and societal engagement. While transfer largely occurs through teaching and research activities involving

practice partners, the Third Mission operates at the organizational level by providing institutional frameworks, such as communication channels, exchange formats, and network structures, that enable and support these interactions. In this sense, the Third Mission represents a key mechanism through which higher education institutions contribute to real-world sustainability transformations.

Questionnaire

- Email
- Name
- Role / Position
- E-Mail address
- Higher education institution or research institute (List of higher education institutions in Switzerland)
- Project name of the Transfer and Cooperation project
- Project sequence
- Participating higher education institution(s) or research institute(s)
- Sector of practice partner(s)
- Practice partners
- Other involved stakeholders
- Directly supported Sustainable Development Goal(s)
- Practical objectives for sustainability transformation
- Objectives for teaching (learning outcomes, promoted competences)
- Method applied to conduct the project for transdisciplinary learning for students
 - Service Learning
 - Project Based Learning
 - Problem Based Learning
 - Design Thinking
 - Learning in Living Labs
 - Action Learning
 - Other
- Objectives for research
- Methods applied to conduct research
 - Real-world experiment
 - Real-world laboratories
 - Living labs
 - Citizen science
 - Other
- Project duration
- Total budget (inclusive personnel costs)
 - Less than CHF 10,000
 - CHF 10,000– CHF 100,000
 - More than CHF 100,000
- Personnel resources (including voluntary work)
 - 0.5–2 FTE
 - More than 2 FTE
- Number of directly involved people of your practice partners (in numbers)
- Number of directly involved students (in numbers)
- Project approach and Project description
- Link to project
- Final Comments

Literature

Demele, Uwe; Nölting, Benjamin; Crewett, Wibke & Georgiev, Georgi (2021): Sustainability Transfer as a Concept for Universities in Regional Transformation. MDPI, vol. 13(9), pages 1-25, April.

HochN (2021): Leitfaden Transfer für Nachhaltige Entwicklung an Hochschulen

Stifterverband (2024): Transferbarometer

Wuppertal Institut (2020): Reallabore als umweltbezogenes Politinstrument

Wuppertal Institut (2025): Gute Beispiele für eine gelingende Transformation



Our Mission

Together, we protect the environment and create a future worth living for generations to come.

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