



## DISC Work Package 2

# DISC Theses – Summary



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## Foreword

This collection brings together a selection of Master theses developed in connection to DISC Project. This collection presents a range of Master theses that explore different perspectives on sustainability in the context of higher education and adult learning. The studies reflect a shared interest in how education can support sustainable development and address social, environmental, and ethical challenges in diverse settings.

Each thesis examines different aspects of sustainability and was conducted at one of the DISC partner universities or by student interns of DISC Partner. Topics include sustainability perceptions in sport tourism, the role of human rights education in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals, the application of DISC learning modules in adult education, and the environmental impact of travel related to sport events. The studies apply a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods and reflect the diversity of academic backgrounds and interests among the students.

The work presented here aligns with the broader themes of the **DISC – Developing Innopreneurship, Sustainability & Culture** project. It complements the project's aim of promoting sustainability competences in education and contributes to ongoing discussions about how higher education can respond to global sustainability goals.

We would like to thank all authors and their supervisors for their efforts and insights. This collection is intended to serve as a resource for educators, researchers, and others interested in sustainability-related research and education in European higher education.

## **The DISC study programme: An approach to integrating education for sustainable development into higher education.**

*Jenny Wedler, University Duisburg-Essen, Germany*

Universities play a key role in the context of sustainable development. It is therefore essential that students acquire key competencies through education for sustainable development (ESD) in order to help shape a sustainable transformation.

The accreditation of study programs is resource-intensive, so flexible solutions are needed to incorporate the topic into existing study programs. This master's thesis explores how ESD can be integrated into existing study programs and to what extent the blended learning concept of the DISC study program can contribute to the implementation of ESD at universities.

The theoretical part highlights the fundamentals of sustainable development, key competencies of ESD (e.g., systemic, anticipatory, and normative thinking), and didactic concepts such as design thinking and situated learning. The evaluation design of this thesis combines quantitative and qualitative methods. An initial survey of European students shows that sustainable development is of great interest in higher education, but that its implementation in degree programs is not yet understood as a cross-cutting task.

The evaluation results for the DISC study program show that the thematic focus of the course, in combination with the design thinking method, is particularly well suited to embedding ESD in existing degree programs and promoting key competencies.

Link to full text:

[https://disc-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Masterarbeit-Jenny-Wedler\\_en.pdf](https://disc-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Masterarbeit-Jenny-Wedler_en.pdf)

*Evaluators Prof. Esther Winther and Dr. Tim Scholze Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education, IBW at University Duisburg-Essen*

## **Human Rights Education as an opportunity to raise awareness for the Sustainable Development Goals in European Higher Education Institutions**

*Gabriela Soares Andrade dos Santos, Sant' Anna School of Advanced Studies, Intern of SMART, Torino, IT*

This thesis aims to analyse through the mixed methodology to what extent European HEI implement Human Rights Education in their curricula, especially in courses apart from social studies. Moreover, to what extent an effective implementation of Human Rights Education could raise awareness for the achievement of the UN SDGs. To that end, we provide a conceptual framework about the Human Rights Law System and the Emergence of Sustainable Development. To demonstrate the impact that a Human Rights Education could have on HEI settings, we defend an education based on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, from Paulo Freire.

*Co-Evaluator: Dr Tim Scholze, UDE*

Link to full text:

[https://disc-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Master-Thesis-Gabriela-Santos\\_.pdf](https://disc-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Master-Thesis-Gabriela-Santos_.pdf)

### **The importance of perceived sustainability, motivation to participate and involvement in destination choice: The case of surfers** Teaching and learning sustainability.

A common characteristic of people involved in surfing is the time and energy spent travelling in search of the perfect wave and new surfing locations. This study aims to investigate the perception of sustainability in terms of motivation and destination choice as it relates to surfers' involvement. The investigation of the research variables is conducted on a sample of 152 participants involved in surfing through an online questionnaire. Specifically, surfers' views on environmental issues are explored using the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) scale. The results of the survey highlighted the complex relationship between motivation and sustainability perception, with the motivation of enthusiasm standing out from other dimensions, as it is not influenced by environmental awareness. Furthermore, the findings highlight that engagement with surfing is mainly based on the characteristics and types of waves, rather than access and infrastructure, which function supportively in enhancing the surfing experience. Finally, the results confirm that a comprehensive approach to incentives and combined management of a location's characteristics with accessibility and existing infrastructure is required to create attractive surfing tourism locations.

*Evaluator: Prof. George Zarifis, AUTH, EL*

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### **Measuring and Reducing The Travel-Related Carbon Footprint Of Sport Events In The Example Of Meo Rip Curl Portugal Pro 2023**

*Christoph Albrecht Zepf, School of Tourism and Maritime Technology of Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, PT*

This work explores the ecological dimensions of sporting events, with a primary focus on the MEO Rip Curl Portugal Pro 2023 as a case study. The main aim of this research is to calculate the travel-related carbon footprint of the event's visitors and to investigate the potential for mitigating their carbon footprint. The research methodology comprises a quantitative survey questionnaire conducted among event attendees. The carbon footprint of various transportation modes was calculated using established emission factors. The study revealed that visitor travel constitutes a significant majority of the event's total carbon footprint. Additionally, it identified the need for enhanced efforts in promoting environmental-friendly transportation options. Finally, an all-encompassing carbon footprint reduction plan was devised to provide event managers with recommendations to mitigate the carbon footprint associated with their events. This work underscores the important role of sports events in environmental education and advocacy. It highlights the importance of measuring, reducing, and mitigating carbon footprints, especially in the context of event visitor travel. The findings emphasise the potential for sports events to adopt more environmental-friendly practices and contribute to global environmental goals. Overall, this research calls for increased awareness and action towards a more eco conscious sports industry.

Link to full text:

[https://disc-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/IPL\\_Zepf.pdf](https://disc-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/IPL_Zepf.pdf)

*Evaluator: Prof. Marta Gaetano, IPL, PT*

## **Education for Sustainable Development through DISC Modules: Adult Learning in Higher Education**

*Ms. Zhamilia Karaglysheva, University of Turin, Faculty of Juridical, Political and Socio-economic Studies, Intern of Smart Revolution, IT*

The thesis evaluates how DISC modules contribute to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in higher education, with a specific focus on adult learners. The research uses a qualitative case study design to assess the effectiveness and challenges of implementing DISC modules across various learning environments. It aims to identify key sustainability competencies developed by adult learners and to explore educators' experiences and institutional perspectives regarding DISC implementation. Data collection methods include interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and surveys conducted at relevant educational settings.

The theoretical framework draws on international policy developments in ESD, adult learning theory, and the Theory of Change to contextualize the DISC initiative. The analysis reveals that DISC modules foster critical thinking, collaboration, systems thinking, and values-based learning among adult learners, contributing meaningfully to sustainability education. Educators highlighted both the pedagogical strengths of DISC modules and the practical challenges in their delivery, such as time constraints, varying learner backgrounds, and institutional support.

Findings suggest that while DISC modules offer a promising model for embedding ESD in higher education, their success depends on alignment with institutional priorities, educator training, and learner engagement strategies. The study concludes with recommendations for enhancing the impact of DISC-based education and offers avenues for future research in sustainability learning for adults in higher education contexts.

*Note: This thesis will be published in September 2025.*

*Co-evaluator and counsellor: Dtssa. Enrica Pautasso, SMART, Torino, IT*

## **Exploring the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development in the education, training and current work of educational staff**

*Fenna Henics (UDE), June 2025 within her Doctoral Thesis, University Duisburg-Essen*

This study, developed within the DISC project, investigates how educational staff perceive their preparation for and current implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Based on a survey of 111 respondents from various countries and educational sectors, the study explores ESD exposure during formal education, participation in further training, institutional sustainability strategies, and self-efficacy in applying ESD in professional contexts.

Key findings include:

- Over half of respondents reported that ESD was not addressed in their education and felt it insufficient for their current work, though most acknowledged its relevance in practice.
- Confidence in implementing ESD correlated most strongly with regular workplace engagement in sustainability, rather than formal education or training alone.
- Those in managerial roles reported higher confidence despite similar levels of ESD exposure compared to employees.

- Participants were often unaware whether their organisations had sustainability strategies or quality management systems, pointing to communication gaps within institutions.
- Country-specific differences emerged: Group 2 countries (Italy, Portugal, etc.) showed higher reported strategy implementation than Group 1 (Germany, Austria) and Group 3 (Greece, Serbia).

The study concludes that effective ESD integration requires visible institutional strategies, context-relevant training, and systemic engagement across all organisational levels. It highlights the importance of sustained, practical application over abstract educational content to build confidence and capacity among educators.

*Evaluators. Prof. Esther Winther and Dr. Tim Scholze Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education, IBW at University Duisburg-Essen*

*Note: This thesis will be published in July 2025.*