



**Sustainability**  
**Week** Switzerland

*Sustainability Week Switzerland*

*Concept*

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## Introduction

In times where worldwide challenges like climate change, the refugee crisis or increasing nationalism are daily business we are focusing on the positive trends, possibilities and development. We connect like-minded people and work together with passion to achieve our goals and make our dreams of a just and better world come true. Our vision is to bring sustainable development into all aspects of Swiss Education Institutions and enable them to become global role models for sustainable development in the education sector.

We achieve this through empowering young adults to co-create a bottom-up student movement in the form of a one-week experience. This includes the organization of a number of events (such as workshops, speeches etc.) to raise awareness and provide information to the public. Furthermore, we engage in HEI politics, we develop cafeteria programs to provide more sustainable meals and we foster community-building, education & self-efficacy amongst all stakeholders and motivate everyone to act to leave a positive impact on environment and society. We engage students with fun, a great network and the opportunity to grow personally.

Every year for 6 months, between October and March of the following year a completely new program is organized by students on a voluntary basis. Everything, from fundraising to the invitation of speakers to the organization of the venues and the marketing campaign is done by the local team. The program, therefore, highly varies each year. The first Sustainability Week took place in 2013 at University of Zurich with the goal to raise the awareness for daily sustainability. Ever since the initiative has grown into the biggest student-led movement in the field of sustainability in Switzerland and has become nationally known through various achievements such as its influence on the delegation position for sustainability at the University of Zurich, its appearance in the national radio channel or its participation at Swiss-wide conferences. Overall, the Sustainability Week Switzerland has organized more than 250 events (150 in Zurich) and has reached more than 25'000 people (15'000 in Zurich) in the past 6 years.

## Vision

Our understanding of sustainability is based on the so-called priority model (i.e. strong sustainability). It describes the very crucial interdependencies that economy is embedded in society which itself is embedded in ecology. Therefore, whatever is done on an economical ground must be structured within acceptable social & ecological boundaries. The same applies to society, while acting within ecological boundaries. This very basic understanding of sustainable decision-making often seems to be forgotten when looking at how our world works right now. We want to emphasize on the fact that we need to decrease our ecological footprint and respect human rights before economic profit is pursuit. But just considering these three dimensions is not enough. Citing the Brundtland Report from 1987 a sustainable development is "a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This highlights the fact that we need to think in longer terms than we did so far. The present generation cannot live at the expense of the upcoming generations. Therefore, we need to think more intergenerational. Two more ingredients are left for what we consider an actual sustainable development. Firstly, this does not just concern some spots on our earth, it concerns all of them. Consequently, we need to achieve sustainable development starting from a local point of view up to a regional and even a global perspective. Secondly, we need to aim for improvement wherever it can. We cannot just rely on a change on a certain level of society. In order to preserve a functioning economy within a functioning society within a functioning ecology we need start acting personally, politically and finally societally.

There are several reasons why we think that higher education institutions<sup>1</sup> play an important role in how our society will look like in the future. First of all, they have always been a breeding place for upcoming social changes as they generate knowledge and educate people on social context, innovations and technologies. After five years of earning a full master's degree, a HEI shapes its graduates by what values they promote. These graduates are likely to have influential positions in the future which means that the manner of their education will have an impact on society. Therefore, it is important that if we want to achieve a more sustainable future we need to get our HEI to act in such ways and to promote corresponding values and philosophies. Furthermore, as we are students ourselves it is important to us, that we are part of this change. There lies big potential in turning the Swiss HEI more sustainable and advocating a new view on how a sustainable world may look like. Thus, it is important that we use this potential and the enormous privilege that comes with it to contribute our part. It is important to understand that although we are student-based, we are not solely a bottom-up movement. We cover broad public interests and are engaged in many Swiss HEI. Their possibility to advance quick top-down changes are promoted by our integrative bottom-up initiatives. We are glad that our demands and our activities are so well received and progressing in fruitful cooperation with all Swiss HEI.

In summary our vision is that we can use the credibility and influence of our Swiss HEI to create a sustainable mindset not only among students & HEI staff but also on the direction our society needs to head if we want to live in a sustainable and better future. The Swiss government has committed to the Sustainable Development Goal as well as ratified the Paris Agreement. We want to speed up this development and support our government as well as the society overall. The vision of a more sustainable world is not just our idea, but it is proved, signed and followed-up all over the world.

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<sup>1</sup> With higher education institutions we address all kinds of tertiary education institutions there are.

## The Project

The core of the Sustainability Week Switzerland (SWS) consists of Local Sustainability Weeks (LSW) taking place annually all across Switzerland. Every LSW aims to promote sustainability at their particular HEI, among students, staff and the public overall. All work done by students and staff participating in the LSW & SWS is completely based on voluntarism. During our first edition in 2018 we managed to set up eleven LSW at over 20 HEI with over 300 students organizing more than 100 events all across Switzerland in just six months of preparation. This successful start shows how students all across the country want a change towards sustainability and that they are willing to spend their time and energy on helping to do so despite their demanding studies. As for now each Sustainability Week consists of three pillars: A series of events on sustainability, HEI politics & cafeteria communication.

### How we are organized

The SWS is a commission of the previously mentioned VSN-FDD-FSS and consists of a core team which keeps an overview over all LSW across Switzerland. Its main goal is to provide the necessary tools to set up a LSW, to help out whenever it's possible and to ensure long-term existence. Therefore, it's very important that we are able to inspire & help everyone who is willing to support this change but unsure how to do so. Hence, all our documents such as guidelines on fundraising, HEI politics, basic principles can be downloaded from our website for free. We strongly encourage everybody who wants to set up a LSW or something similar to get in contact with us so that we can help them implementing it.

It is important that we do not only demand certain changes but that we actively try to implement them in our own lifestyle and way of organizing the SWS. This means that we've elaborated a code of conduct which consists of many principles on how we're trying to act sustainable. These guidelines are applied by all LSW and cover specific topics. Thereby we ensure that for example no speaker travels to the SWS by plane, no single used-plastic is used for apéros and so on.

### Series of events

The main attraction of every LSW is a wide variety of events on any topic related to sustainability. All of these events are free of charge and open to the broad public. Therefore, we emphasize the fact that although we are a student-based organization we are targeting society overall - a more sustainable lifestyle affects everybody. What these events are on and what format they have is a choice of each LSW. To give a quick idea, what an event might look like, here are some former examples: Workshops on ZeroWaste-Lifestyle, panel discussions on alternative economic systems and on the responsibilities of HEI, lectures on lab-grown beef, field trips to organic farmers and many more.

### Goals:

1. Promote public work in order to cooperate with city officials and reach a broader audience.
2. Reaching as many students, staff and the broad public as possible.
3. Having an impact by educating and motivating visitors to adapt a more sustainable lifestyle.

### Higher Education Institution Politics

We're not only focusing on educating visitors but on enforcing active change at HEI as well. In 2016 the [Swiss Association of Student Organisations for Sustainability](#) (VSN-FDD-FSS) in collaboration with the [Swiss Student Union](#) published a policy paper and a demand-paper which both aim to foster sustainability among Swiss HEI, their students and the federal government itself. The demand-paper consist of 13 precise demands (7 to Swiss HEI, 5 to the federal government, 1 to Swiss students) which are explained and backed-up by the detailed policy paper. These well-founded documents have officially been acknowledged by the Swiss Student Union and all its members during the Sustainability Week in Zurich in 2016 but have not been followed up enough since. Thus, it is crucial that the SWS encourages and coaches the local initiatives to enforce the proposed demands at their HEI and collaboratively working its implementation.

#### Goals:

1. Every Local Sustainability Week has a dedicated HEI politics team
2. All participating HEI publish an annual sustainability report
3. All participating HEI have a dedicated position on sustainability issues
4. All participating HEI implement at least two demands from either the VSN-demand-paper or new ones in collaboration with the Local Sustainability Week (Goals 1 & 2 are excluded from this count)
5. All participating HEI agree on committing to 100% renewable energy by 2030

### Cafeteria Communication

The third pillar of every LSW is the latest addition but has already becomes an effective tool. As diet plays an important role in a sustainable lifestyle it is important to inform on different diets and their effects. These do not only consist of arguments related to animal ethics but range much further to topics like environmental degradation, deforestation, climate change, human health, economic resilience and many more. We encourage each Sustainability Week to help cafeteria companies and collaborate with them in a constructive and polite manner. Furthermore, it is crucial that we do not just try to impose new eating habits on customers by changing a cafeteria's offer but that we educate them as well. Only if customers truly understand why certain diets are more sustainable than others they are likely to switch. Only if they start to change their food habits personally we have achieved a true sustainable development in this field.

#### Goals:

1. Every Local Sustainability Week has a dedicated cafeteria communication team
2. Every cafeteria that is part of an HEI offers a sustainability menu during the Local Sustainability Week
3. Every cafeteria that is part of an HEI actively promotes using a reusable cup and offers some reward for buying beverages in reusable cups
4. Every cafeteria has an informational campaign on alternative nutrition during the Local Sustainability Week
5. Every related cafeteria has a concept to reduce their food waste.

## Financial Plan

All work of the entire SWS team (core team and participants) is carried out on an honorary basis. Therefore, as a thank-you, one team-building weekend and one meal together are planned per year. All expenses (train travel, meals, etc.) from the SWS as well as from all LSW will be reimbursed.

After the presentation of a concept on the implementation and long-term finance for a LSW, the respective team receives a start-up financing of CHF 10,000. This money is to be supplemented by an application to the respective HEI by a further CHF 10,000, of which at least 50% is Real Money (remainder as Virtual Money). In addition, a declaration of intent from the respective HEI is required to ensure that the newly founded LSW will remain in existence for the long term and thus also receive financial support for further implementations. The financing by SWS serves to maintain the LSW over a period of one year. After an initial implementation, the organisers of the respective LSW ensure the financing themselves. In addition to the universities, other stakeholders such as foundations or student associations can also be requested. This ensures that the LSW acts and functions independently of the SWS. The SWS advises LSW on sponsoring and fundraising and ensures an exchange of experience.

A detailed financing plan for the coming years is in preparation and will be based on the one hand on support from foundations and on the other hand on a possible annual contribution from interested HEIs.

## Achievements & Development

Although its first implementation was only in 2018, the SWS already grew to be the largest student-based movement on sustainability in Switzerland. In numbers this means that in 11 cities at over 20 HEI over 300 students organized over 100 events and thereby reached more than 8'000 visitors. This outreach is a natural consequence of what the LSW in Zurich experience its first five years (more about this in chapter 5. History). In just six months of preparation we already accomplished all our goals written down in our former concept and reached several milestones:

- For the opening event of the SWS, we managed to receive a personal [video message](#) by former Vice-president and Nobel Laureate Al Gore in which he complimented our work and emphasized on the fact that students have the ability to help and shape our future society.
- Several LSW started to actively engage with their cities in order to advance sustainability on a societal level (e.g. Rapperswil, Neuchâtel).
- The continuing professional work done by the LSW Zurich has led to several changes at the participating HEI and has been awarded several times now. Most recently it won the [2017 GUPES Green Gown Award](#).
- In 2018 the SWS has reached the final round of the Excellent Student Leadership Award in 2018 by the International Sustainability Campus Network (ISCN) and received great recognition from the Clinton Global Initiative for its idea of a national sustainability movement.
- Every participating HEI agreed to financially support the respective LSW and thereby committing to a long-term project.
- Our project is well covered on national media and has been featured in several magazines.

## History

The idea of offering a Sustainability Week at HEI first came up in Zurich in 2012. Back then Annuscha Wassmann, a student at the University of Zurich, started this project on her own. Her first Sustainability Week went extremely well and received good feedback, which pushed her to organize two more in the following years. Even when Annuscha left, more and more students joined and worked together inspired by contributing to a better tomorrow. More and more positive feedback came pouring in, which pushed a few students to dream about spreading the best practice of a Sustainability Week across Switzerland. During the summer of 2017, these students (i.e. we) sat together and wrote an application for the federal subsidy program called *U Change - Student Initiatives for Sustainable Development*. Fortunately, the application was accepted, and they had to deliver their ambitious goal of setting up at least five Sustainability Weeks.

The first few weeks of preparation were obviously chaotic as we had to write concepts & guidelines, design a logo, set up a homepage, contact every HEI in Switzerland including their students and many other things awaited our attention. After receiving a positive feedback from nearly all HEI and student organisations in November 2017 the first Kick-Off Event in Bern took place. About 20 students from several HEI were interested in what this project is about and in what we can achieve together. It didn't take very long till other requests came in from student who wanted to join this movement. Unfortunately, most of these students had little experience in organizing such events, had trouble finding further motivated students and didn't really know where to start. Hence, we carried out two workshops based on event organisation & on team management. Both of them were quite successful as nearly all newly founded teams managed to set up outstanding LSW. We are honored and proud that we managed to reach out to all these ambitious and motivated students. Bringing them together for this project has been amazing and keeps inspiring us to do more ourselves. Only as a collective movement we can bring about change and this is what drives us.

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