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UNIVERSITY
OF BERN

CDE
CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT
AND ENVIRONMENT

Co-designing pathways for transformative change

Online International Winter School on Sustainable Development for Bachelor's and Master's Students



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Programme Online Winter School

Tuesday, 2 December 2025	Monday, 26 January 2026	Tuesday, 27 January 2026	Wednesday, 28 January 2026	Thursday, 29 January 2026	Friday, 30 January 2026
Kick-off event	08:45-09:45 Check-in	08:45-09:00 Check-in	08:45-09:00 Check-in	08:45-09:00 Check-in	08:45-09:00 Check-in
09:00–12:00: Kick-off event - #01: Welcome and introduction - #02a: Project task: Co-designing solutions to sustainability challenges	09:45-10:00 Break	09:00-10:45 #06: Change agents	09:00–10:45 #09: Sustainability governance, concepts and case studies	09:00-10:45 #11: Post 2030 Agenda	09:00–10:00 #02c: Student projects
	10:00–10:45 #03: Transformations towards sustainable futures				10:00–10:15 Break
	10:45–11:00 Break				#02d: 10:15–14:30 Presentation and discussion of student, flexible break
	11:00-12:00 #04: Pathways to transformation				
	12:00–13:30 Break				
For the time between the kick-off event and the winter school, you will be given four preparatory tasks on concepts of sustainability, intercultural learning, the project task, and readings related to the sessions.	13:30–15:15 #02b: Co-designing solutions – student projects	13:30–15:15 #08: Inequality – a tale of two stories	13:30–16:45 #02c: Student projects – individual group work and check-ins	13:30–16:45 #02c: Student projects – individual group work	14:30 – 14:45 Break
	15:15–15:30 Break	15:15–15:30 Break			#13: 14:45 –15:45 Reflection and closing
	15:30–16:15 #05a: ESD & reflective journaling	15:30–16:15 #02c: Student projects – individual group work		16:00–16:45 #05b: Group and self-reflection	
	16:15–16:30 Check-out	16:15–16:30 Check-out			16:45–17:00 Check-out
		16:30–17:30 Virtual city tour			

Session descriptions

Session 1: Welcome and introduction

The kick-off event of the online school will be opened by a welcome session. We will introduce the programme and the topics we will address, as well as a set of “house rules” that will ensure smooth running of the online course.

Session 2: Project task: Co-designing solutions to sustainability challenges – introduction to student projects

Dr. Lara Lundsqaard-Hansen, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainability Governance Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

Problems of unsustainable development are manifold, and science has helped to identify and characterize many of them. But what can we do about them? We need to find solutions. This marks the start to your project tasks during Sessions 2b to 2d, that you will co-develop in student groups to tackle a sustainability challenge of your interest.

Short preparatory tasks in online modules

In-between the kick-off event and the winter school, you will get four preparatory tasks on concepts of sustainability, intercultural learning, the project task, and readings related to the sessions.

Session 3: Transformation towards sustainable futures

Prof. Dr. Thomas Brey, Director, CDE, University of Bern

This presentation will start with a brief overview of increasingly complex global development challenges. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Sustainable Development Report call for a new form of science that actively helps to address these challenges. Science must provide knowledge that is capable of guiding negotiations and shaping transformations towards more sustainable development. This is not an easy task: it requires scientists to find new inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to research, as wicked and dynamic sustainability problems are rarely captured within the boundaries of established scientific disciplines.



Session descriptions

Session 4: Pathways to transformation

Dr. Brigitte Portner, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainable Land Systems Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern and Dr. Isabelle Providoli, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainable Land Systems Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

How can we make transformative change happen? How can your research field contribute, and what role might you play, as a researcher or in your future work outside academia? In this session, we will reflect on different knowledge types and research approaches that can help advance sustainability transformations.

Session 2b: Co-designing solutions to sustainability challenges – introduction to student projects

Dr. Lara Lundsgaard-Hansen, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainability Governance Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

GET READY in this session to start your group work. You will learn about the methodology of *participatory visioning and future planning* and how you can use it to develop concrete action plans for your project ideas.

Session 5a: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and reflective journaling

Dr. Isabelle Providoli, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainable Land Systems Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern and Dr. Brigitte Portner, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainable Land Systems Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

What is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and why is it so important? Better inclusion of sustainability topics in university curricula is key to tackling sustainability challenges. Teaching approaches and curricula need to focus more on competences, as it is important to build academic knowledge, professional skills, and critical awareness (attitude, values) simultaneously. In this session, we will have a closer look at the various competences you need to become an agent of change. Besides, we will start a process of reflection that will guide us through the week and through our individual learning journeys.



Session descriptions

Session 6: Students as change agents

Dr. Lilian Trechsel, Head of Transformative Education and Science Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

We will learn how students can act as change agents. Students are instrumental in shaping their surroundings, the communities they live in, and society in general: they play a crucial role in steering these spaces in a more sustainable direction. How can students assume this important responsibility, be aware of their role as boundary agents, and become agents of change? We will explore research results from a study in Switzerland on students in a semi-formal setting where they carry out research projects with different societal actors.

Session 7: Contextual awareness

Dr. Lara Lundsgaard-Hansen, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainability Governance Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

For any kind of project, it is important to know the context, in which the project is operating, be it for research, business, development cooperation, humanitarian aid, or politics. Especially if the context is unfamiliar to us, it is important to first develop an understanding of the prevailing situation. In this session, we learn how to analyse an unfamiliar context. We also learn about visible as well as invisible conflicts, which we need to take into consideration. These basic insights form the basis for doing no harm to anyone when we pursue projects in unfamiliar contexts.

Session 8: Inequality, a tale of two stories – which do we tell?

Dr. Christoph Bader, Member of the Executive Committee, Head of Transformative Education and Science Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

How can we alleviate poverty and inequality? What works, and what doesn't? We will discuss past, current, and potential measures and analyse the difference between the two concepts. When is inequality a problem, and do we really need economic growth to reduce poverty and inequality – or is *growth* the problem? This session will conclude with a discussion of what policies should be promoted for what purpose – and how to move forward.



Session descriptions

Session 2c: Co-designing solutions to sustainability challenges – individual group work

Dr. Lara Lundsgaard-Hansen, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainability Governance Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

Building on Sessions 2a–b, you will work on your student project in your group. Lecturers will be available at certain times to answer the groups' questions.

Session 9: Sustainability governance – concepts and case studies

Dr. Lara Lundsgaard-Hansen, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainability Governance Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

This session will focus on governance and its importance for sustainable development. You will be familiarized with the complex meaning of governance and learn about key elements of sustainability governance. Further, we will take a closer look at different case studies. One case study focuses on land governance in Myanmar, another on the governance of mega-infrastructure projects such as deep-sea ports, highways, tourism development zones, or solar energy parks. A third case study focuses on transformation towards renewable energy in Germany.

Session 10: The prices, living income and sustainable development nexus

Dr. Irene Musselli, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainability Governance Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

This session will explore the intricate relationship between prices, income, and sustainable development. Improving the prices paid to farmers is crucial to poverty alleviation in rural areas. The proposed impact pathway suggests that higher prices will lead to increased incomes for farmers. These income gains can help address other significant sustainability issues related to farming, such as child labour and deforestation. However, the situation is more complex than it appears. The relationship between prices, living income, and sustainability is multifaceted and non-linear, involving intricate feedback loops and unintended consequences. In this session, we will examine this issue using real-world examples and projects grounded in practice.



Session descriptions

Session 11: Current 2030 Agenda governance and what comes next?

Sara Frey, Research Associate and PhD Candidate, Sustainability Governance Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

In this session we examine the current governance surrounding the 2030 Agenda, including the High-Level Political Forum and the roles played by states and civil society. We also explore emerging processes and early discussions concerning a post-2030 framework.

Session 12: Food systems and their role in sustainability transformations

PD Dr. Theresa Tribaldos, Head of Just Economies and Human Well-Being Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

Food systems play a key role in sustainability transformations. They cause and are affected by global change processes. Their connections to almost all aspects of human life are reflected in their relations to all Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda, and they are fundamental for human and nature health outcomes. This session will provide an overview of food systems, highlighting their importance – and levers – for sustainability transformations.

Session 5b: Group reflection and self-reflection

Dr. Isabelle Providoli, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainable Land Systems Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern and Dr. Brigitte Portner, Senior Research Scientist, Sustainable Land Systems Impact Area, CDE, University of Bern

In this session, you will be guided to reflect on your group work process. In small groups, you will reflect on challenging as well as rewarding moments.

Session 2d: Presentation of student projects

In this session, you will present your student project and discuss it both with your fellow students and with the lecturers. Your fellow students will provide peer feedback. You will also reflect on the group work process and your interdisciplinary journey (focusing on challenges you faced during group work).

Session 15: Reflection and closing

In this session, we will reflect on your learnings and possible future actions you aim to pursue. This official closing of the online summer school will be followed by farewell drinks that we will share online – so please bring a drink!

