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EMPOWERING FUTURE LEADERS: ISEC LISBOA'S STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Higher education institutions are instrumental in shaping the future through the cultivation of intellectual growth, extensive research endeavors, and societal progress. The imperative for sustainable development has gained significant traction in recent years, with increasing awareness of global challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality.

In its distinguished position as a higher education institution, ISEC Lisboa assumes a pivotal role as a nexus for knowledge creation, innovation, and the education of future professionals across diverse fields. Recognizing this responsibility, ISEC Lisboa is committed to establishing and upholding elevated standards. Through the unwavering adoption of best practices, the institution not only strives for continuous improvement in its own operations but also endeavors to be a positive influence, a source of motivation, and a guiding force within its sphere towards a more sustainable trajectory.

ISEC Lisboa actively embraces its role as an innovator, consistently seeking to enhance its performance. In doing so, it contributes significantly to the development of leaders equipped not only with knowledge but also with the essential skills and values to navigate the complexities of our rapidly evolving world. This dedication reinforces the institution's commitment to fostering a sustainable future, where its impact extends beyond the confines of academia, influencing broader societal progress.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Strategies for sustainability, SDGs, Leadership, Higher education institutions, ISEC Lisboa

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, humanity faces a paramount challenge: securing sustainable development for its enduring existence. Education stands out as a critical factor in achieving this objective (Vargas-Merino et al., 2024), with higher education institutions (HEIs) assuming a central role in shaping the future. These institutions play a pivotal role in molding the next generation of leaders, innovators, and conscientious global citizens. Functioning as catalysts for global, national, and local innovation, economic progress, and societal well-being, HEIs are instrumental in confronting social and environmental challenges. This is realized through the education of students, the dissemination of research findings to the broader community, and active involvement in the development of civil society through meaningful social engagement.

As primary knowledge producers, HEIs bear the crucial responsibility of providing society with the wisdom and expertise essential for future generations, acting as a potent force steering towards a more sustainable future. The concept of “education for sustainable development” (ESD) has gained prominence in recent years as a pivotal educational initiative addressing various issues associated with human development (Elmassah t al., 2022; Mokski et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Vargas-Merino et al., 2024). There is a growing recognition of the importance of integrating sustainability education into higher education curricula, often closely aligned with the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Serafini et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023). The SDGs serve as a comprehensive framework for tackling global challenges and act as a catalyst for sustainable development (SD) (Elmassah et al., 2022; Leal et al., 2024). The commitment of HEIs to this cause is evident in the substantial participation of over

700 institutions from 85 countries in the 2020 ranking, highlighting the global emphasis on integrating the SDGs into higher education practices (Poza ate al., 2021; THE, 2022).

Furthermore, embedding sustainability considerations, inspired by the SDGs, across various levels of HEI strategy – Institutional Commitment, Curricula, Research and Development, Community Engagement – can be a powerful catalyst for SD (Biancardi et al., 2023; Leal et al., 2024). This influence permeates the institution’s global activities, creating a cascading effect. In the context of scarcity and emergency, the promotion of sustainable development and sustainability transcends a mere managerial role; it assumes a proactive stance. It not only plays a pivotal role in the institution’s management but also emerges as a strategic force propelling the entire community towards a shared sustainable future. Therefore, the objective of this work is to showcase the strategies implemented by ISEC Lisboa for sustainable development, aligned with the SDGs.

ISEC LISBOA’S STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

The institutional commitment of ISEC Lisboa is a multifaceted approach encompassing the implementation of the Sustainability Policy (SP), the Strategic Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change (SPACC), and the contribution to the SDGs of the 2030 UN Agenda.

ISEC Lisboa’s SP is grounded in a series of commitments that guide daily actions, beginning with the pledge to SD. This commitment, when applied to institution practices, seeks to simultaneously fulfill the institutional mission, foster economic prosperity, ensure the well-being of students

and employees, uphold environmental responsibility, and promote social equity. The SP of ISEC Lisboa is structured around six dimensions as illustrated in Figure 1.

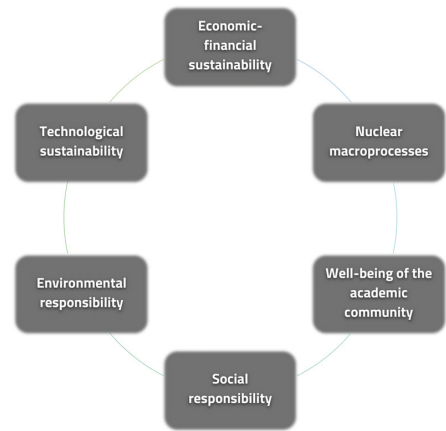


Figure 1: Dimensions of ISEC Lisboa’s Sustainability Policy.

Recognizing that climate change poses one of the most significant challenges to contemporary society, ISEC Lisboa acknowledges the urgency of combating this global issue. The institution views itself as a driver of global, national, and local innovation, economic development, and social well-being. As a response, ISEC Lisboa incorporates the SPACC into its SP, recognizing its responsibility to future generations who will occupy leadership and decision-making positions. The measures contained in SPACC result from a participatory methodology (Figure 2) that allowed determining a path for the implementation of each one, based on a set of actions.

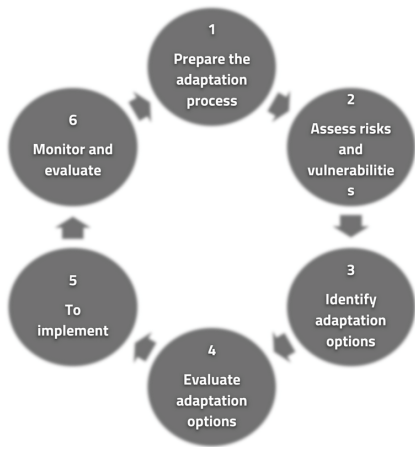


Figure 2: ISEC Lisboa’s stages of adaptation to climate change.

SUSTAINABILITY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

ISEC Lisboa is actively advancing sustainability-focused teaching and learning, aiming not only to equip students with high-level professional skills but also to nurture responsible citizens who positively impact the environment, the society, and the economy. To achieve this overarching goal, the institution has implemented a range of initiatives designed to disseminate and promote sustainability. Furthermore, there is a dedicated focus on raising awareness and understanding of the SDGs, fostering the skills of educators through various seminars and training sessions within the academic community. Additionally, a concerted effort has been made to seamlessly integrate sustainability content into curricular units across diverse study cycles. This comprehensive approach involves classifying and cataloging the contribution of each curricular unit to the SDGs through detailed Curricular Unit Sheets. In the year 2022, the outcomes of this initiative materialized in the cataloging of curricular units within the 24 degree-awarding study cycles currently in operation. A total of 481 curricular units, representing 91.62% of the 525 possible curricular units, were successfully classified (Figure 3).

ISEC Lisboa actively seeks to contribute to the responsible and sustainable development of society through its core activities. In addition to delivering education and training for citizenship and community engagement, the institution actively generates and disseminates knowledge, providing solutions to social and environmental challenges. In line with the UN’ 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, ISEC Lisboa became a member of the SDGs Portugal Alliance in 2019, an initiative spearheaded by the UN Global Compact Network Portugal. Additionally, in 2020, the institution became a member of the Sustainable Campus Network, fostering collaboration between national higher education institutions for the implementation of sustainable development principles in environmental, social, and economic aspects. ISEC Lisboa’s activities contribute to the five dimensions of the SDGs, known as the 5Ps: respond to People’s needs, protect the Planet, foster Prosperity, and promote Peace, through national and international Partnerships. The commitment to the SDGs is explicitly outlined in the institution’s Strategic Development Plan (ISEC, 2021), which delineates a set of operational objectives and concrete actions to be undertaken in the four-year period from 2021 to 2024.



Figure 3: Distribution of the SDGs in the Curricular Unit Sheets classified in the various degree-awarding study cycles (Higher Technical Courses, Bachelor’s Degrees and Master’s Degrees) in 2022.

SUSTAINABILITY IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Recognizing the escalating challenges confronting both society in general and businesses in particular, ISEC Lisboa, as a knowledge-producing HEI, aspires to position itself as a vital force in generating applied and collaborative knowledge while actively disseminating such knowledge. In this vein, and with the overarching goal of aligning research efforts with contributions to the SDGs, the research outcomes of 2022 has been strategically harmonized with the SDGs (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Mapping of ISEC Lisboa's 2022 research outcomes, in accordance with the SDGs.

The data depicted in Figure 4 underscores the commitment of ISEC Lisboa to the SDGs, with a noteworthy 89.35% of research outcomes classified under SDG 4 (Quality Education), 17.52% under SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 16.50% under SDG 3 (Good Health). Conversely, there is currently no research addressing the objectives outlined in SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) (Figure 4). This comprehensive mapping not only exemplifies the institution's dedication to addressing critical global challenges but also serves as a testament to its strategic alignment with the overarching principles of sustainable development.

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY

ISEC Lisboa actively contributes to local, regional, and national development through its commitment to community. Recognizing its institutional responsibility in this domain, ISEC Lisboa engages in interinstitutional collaboration, community service provision, external engagement, cultural, sporting, and artistic initiatives, participation in national projects and partnerships, and a commitment to enhancing local and regional appeal and development. Generating revenue through these activities is an integral part of ISEC Lisboa's social pact. Furthermore, ISEC Lisboa endeavors to create an academic environment characterized by cultural diversity, inclusion, tolerance, and social responsibility. The institution fosters collective awareness and commitment to well-being across various dimensions, including the social, environmental, and cultural aspects.

In terms of cooperation with other national entities, the year 2022 witnessed the establishment of 45 new partnerships, enhancing the provision of services and community engagement initiatives. Throughout 2022, ISEC Lisboa orchestrated initiatives to promote intergenerational solidarity, addressing issues such as elderly isolation exacerbated by the pandemic. Actions included crafting cards with Merry Christmas messages and simple manual activities for the senior population, benefiting 90 individuals, supported by a community Private Social Solidarity Institution. Collaborative efforts were also directed at ensuring access to adequate food for those in need, involving the academic community and volunteering.

ISEC Lisboa demonstrated its commitment to social responsibility through various volunteering activities in 2022, such as collecting and delivering food items, supporting refugee families, and engaging in initiatives

with social and parish centers. Additionally, ISEC Lisboa formally endorsed the Charter for Diversity in 2022, aligning itself with the European Commission's initiative to promote inclusion, diversity, and equal opportunities at work, irrespective of cultural, ethnic, and social origin, sexual orientation, gender, age, physical characteristics, personal style, and religion. In terms of community outreach, 25 sustainability-focused actions took place in 2022, culminating in the Sustainable Week event held in December. This week-long event, open to both the academic community and the general public, addressed various sustainability-related topics across different dimensions (Oliveira et al., 2023).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Higher education institutions stand uniquely poised to spearhead the implementation of sustainable development strategies, exerting influence over students, communities, and industries. The significance of these strategies cannot be overstated, as they hold the potential to profoundly shape a more sustainable and resilient world. The focus areas encompass educating change-makers, pioneering research for innovative solutions, spearheading campus sustainability initiatives, fostering community engagement and partnerships, and achieving global impact through international collaboration.

Functioning as hubs for knowledge creation and dissemination, higher education institutions are instrumental in equipping students with the skills, knowledge, and values necessary to confront intricate environmental and social challenges. Graduates emerge as change-makers capable of propelling sustainable practices across diverse sectors, spanning from business and science to policymaking.

These institutions, often revered as research powerhouses, engage in studies that push

the boundaries of knowledge. Sustainable development necessitates inventive solutions, prompting higher education institutions to drive research efforts centered on renewable energy, eco-friendly technologies, and sustainable practices. By cultivating a culture of research, these institutions actively contribute to the formulation of viable solutions addressing the challenges posed by our swiftly changing world.

Beyond theoretical realms, higher education institutions exemplify leadership by implementing tangible sustainable practices within their campuses. Initiatives such as energy-efficient buildings, waste reduction programs, and sustainable transportation options not only minimize ecological footprints but also serve as concrete demonstrations of commitment to environmentally responsible practices. This commitment inspires students and the broader community to integrate similar practices into their daily lives.

Recognizing the collaborative nature of sustainable development, higher education institutions extend their influence beyond campus boundaries. Engaging with local communities and forging partnerships with businesses, governments, and non-profit organizations enable these institutions to collectively address regional sustainability challenges. This collaborative approach fosters a shared sense of responsibility and facilitates the implementation of comprehensive, effective solutions.

In the interconnected global landscape, higher education institutions wield the potential for substantial impact by nurturing international collaboration on sustainable development initiatives. Joint research projects, student exchange programs, and the exchange of best practices contribute to a concerted effort to tackle global challenges. This interconnectedness magnifies the impact of higher education in molding a sustainable

future on a worldwide level.

Highlighting ISEC Lisboa's strategic initiatives, grounded in institutional commitment, the integration of sustainability into education, impactful research, and community engagement, this institution plays a pivotal role in the collective pursuit of sustainable development. These strategies not only generate positive impacts in the present but also lay the groundwork for a more sustainable and resilient future, actively contributing to the shaping of a sustainable tomorrow. Furthermore, the sustainable development strategies implemented by

ISEC Lisboa transcend mere environmental conservation; they serve as a potent mechanism for grooming future leaders. Emphasizing holistic education, problem-solving prowess, ethical considerations, experiential learning, and global perspectives, ISEC Lisboa contributes to the cultivation of leaders who possess not only knowledge but also the requisite skills and values to navigate the intricacies of our swiftly evolving world. In this manner, higher education emerges as a catalyst, fostering a generation of leaders dedicated to constructing a sustainable and inclusive future

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