



Sustainability Mission Lab



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Authors:

Lodz University of Technology, Poland:

Małgorzata Jarczyńska, Justyna Kopańska, Dorota Piotrowska

Contributors:

Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial and Engaged Universities, Germany:

Emmanuel Ohene

Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain:

Daniel Franco Puntos, Myra Ronzoni

Riga Technical University, Latvia:

Rasma Pipike

Asociación Bienestar y Desarrollo, Spain:

Marina Fancelli

Team Coaching, Poland:

Katarzyna Buss-Nykiel, Rafał Nykiel

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What is the Sustainability Mission Lab?

Sustainability Mission Lab is a flexible learning toolkit built around interactive, real-life activities. It includes **22 educational scenarios** (missions) designed to support the development of **emotional intelligence (EQ)** in connection with the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

Through these scenarios, participants explore sustainability not only as a global concept, but as something that can be experienced and shaped through everyday actions and interactions, especially in the shared spaces we all co-create.

The Sustainability Mission Lab includes three interconnected components:

- **Player mission cards**, which provide task instructions for participants,
- **Moderator mission cards**, which offer facilitation guidance and methodological support,
- **The Mission Catalogue (Excel matrix)**, which helps moderators compare scenarios and design purposeful learning journeys based on competences, SDGs, pedagogical methods, participant needs, and practical requirements.

The missions combine experiential learning with sustainability education. They are designed to foster reflection, critical thinking, creativity, and communication. They also encourage players to become more aware of their own behaviours and everyday choices and help them understand their personal impact on sustainability challenges.

Scenarios can be carried out in a physical city space, classrooms, campuses, or other learning environments. However, outdoor implementation is recommended whenever possible. Urban space offers something that no classroom can fully replicate - real people, real situations, and real opportunities for interaction or spontaneous engagement that can enrich the learning experience.

Who Are the Missions Designed For?

The Sustainability Mission Lab has been designed primarily for young people and adults participating in formal, non-formal, and higher education settings. The missions can be used with secondary school students, university students, youth groups, international participants, and adult learners. Most activities can be adapted to different ages, educational contexts, and levels of prior knowledge about sustainability or emotional intelligence.

The focus is not on expert knowledge, but on participation, reflection, communication, and real-life application. This makes the missions accessible to diverse groups with different educational and cultural backgrounds.

Who Can Be a Moderator?

The missions can be facilitated by teachers, trainers, youth workers, educators, facilitators, student leaders, and other professionals working with groups. Previous expertise in sustainability is helpful but not essential. What is more important is the ability to facilitate discussion, encourage participation, and create a respectful learning environment.

Some missions include ethical dilemmas, role-play, inequality simulations, or emotionally sensitive topics. For these activities, moderators should be able to recognise signs of discomfort, facilitate reflective discussions, and provide appropriate emotional support when needed. They should be capable of maintaining psychological safety and adapting activities to the needs of the participants.



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Key Aspects in the Sustainability Mission Lab

Three Pillars of Sustainability

The Sustainability Mission Lab is based on the understanding that sustainability includes environmental, social, and economic dimensions. These three interconnected pillars form the foundation of the SDGs. By combining these perspectives, this Sustainability Mission Lab reflects the holistic nature of the SDGs and helps participants understand sustainability as a complex, interconnected system.

Learning Through Experience

Rather than learning about sustainability through information alone, participants learn through experience, reflection, discussion, and action. The missions encourage them to explore real situations, make decisions, collaborate with others, and reflect on the consequences of their choices. In this way, participants develop not only sustainability competences, but also a sense of agency by recognising that their actions and everyday decisions can contribute to positive change.

Linking SDGs with Emotional Intelligence

A distinctive feature of the Sustainability Mission Lab is the integration of the SDGs with emotional intelligence. While sustainability challenges are often discussed in environmental, economic, or social terms, addressing them also depends on people's attitudes, emotions, relationships, and everyday decisions.

By combining these perspectives, the missions make global challenges more personal, meaningful and relatable. Participants are encouraged to reflect not only on *what* should change, but also on *how* and *why* people act. At the same time, they develop sustainability competencies alongside empathy, communication, self-awareness, and other social-emotional skills which are essential for creating more sustainable societies.

Flexible Use of Scenarios

The scenarios are designed as a flexible pool of learning activities. They function as modular building blocks that moderators can freely combine, adapt, and sequence according to their specific educational goals, group dynamics, available time, etc. There is no single “correct” sequence or set of scenarios. They can be used as standalone activities, combined into workshops, or integrated into longer educational programmes.

At the same time, it is important to consider the depth of the learning process. Although a single mission can provide a valuable learning experience, using at least three or four activities is recommended whenever possible. This allows participants to move through a broader learning process, from awareness and reflection to interaction, understanding, and application.

The choice of scenarios should always be intentional. Moderators may focus on a specific theme (e.g. empathy, sustainability awareness, teamwork), target selected SDGs, or design a sequence that gradually develops participants' competences (e.g. from self-awareness to social responsibility). In this way, the scenarios support not only flexibility, but also purposeful educational design.

The role of the moderator is not only to facilitate activities, but also to design a meaningful learning journey - one that responds to participants' needs and creates space for reflection, engagement, and real-world connection.

Example Sequences of Missions

The missions presented below illustrate two examples of how individual scenarios can be combined into coherent learning journeys. They may be used directly, adapted to different contexts, or serve as inspiration for designing sequences that address specific learning objectives.

Example Learning Journey 1: From Self-Awareness to Social Responsibility

The proposed pathway follows a gradual progression:

SELF → WORLD → COMMUNICATION → EMPATHY → SOCIETY

Participants begin by exploring their own emotions and experiences, then move towards observing sustainability challenges in their environment, communicating ideas to others, understanding different perspectives, and finally engaging in complex social decision-making. Rather than teaching sustainability as a collection of facts, the learning journey helps participants develop the attitudes, emotional skills, and critical thinking necessary to engage with real-world challenges.

Mission 1: Stress Busters

Before people can effectively collaborate, solve problems, or engage in challenging discussions, they need to feel emotionally safe and present. In this mission, participants share personal strategies for managing stress and experience a simple wellbeing exercise together. While the activity may appear unrelated to sustainability at first glance, it establishes an important foundation for all subsequent learning.

Methodologically, the activity serves as a low-risk entry point. Participants talk about familiar experiences, there are no right or wrong answers, and social pressure remains low. This helps create an atmosphere where individuals feel comfortable sharing ideas throughout the rest of the programme.

Mission 2: Sustainability Detective

Once participants have reflected on themselves, the focus broadens to their surroundings. Participants actively observe the environment around them and identify examples of unsustainable practices. They become investigators, collecting evidence and proposing solutions.

Importantly, participants discover that sustainability is not only a global issue discussed in reports and policies. It is visible in everyday spaces, behaviours, and decisions.

This mission represents a shift from personal reflection towards environmental and social awareness.

Mission 3: SDG Street Art

Awareness alone rarely creates change. Once participants recognise sustainability challenges, they need opportunities to express ideas and communicate them to others. In this mission, participants transform observations into visual messages, using creative expression. They experience that they can influence their surroundings by making sustainability visible and understandable. They move from being observers to becoming communicators.

Methodologically, this stage introduces participants to the concept of agency. Instead of simply analysing problems, they begin exploring how individuals can shape public awareness and stimulate discussion.

Mission 4: Tall Tales

The next step focuses on understanding people. Through collaborative storytelling, participants create narratives where emotions and sustainability challenges become interconnected. The fictional nature of storytelling allows participants to safely explore perspectives different from their own.

Stories help participants recognise that sustainability problems are ultimately human problems. Decisions are influenced not only by knowledge, but also by emotions, motivations, fears, and relationships.

Methodologically, this stage creates a bridge between cognitive understanding and emotional engagement.

Mission 5: Shelter Dilemma

The final mission represents the culmination of the learning journey. Participants face a realistic social dilemma where every option has consequences, and no solution is entirely fair. They must negotiate, listen to different perspectives, balance competing needs, and make decisions that affect others. This mission integrates all previously developed competences: self-awareness, emotional regulation, critical thinking, communication, empathy, collaboration, ethical decision-making.

Unlike earlier activities, the challenge is intentionally complex and emotionally demanding. Participants discover that sustainability often involves navigating uncertainty, scarcity, competing interests, and moral tensions.

Example Learning Journey 2: Equality and Social Justice

This journey follows a gradual progression:

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES → REAL-LIFE BARRIERS → EMPATHY → ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

Participants first explore how unequal life circumstances create different opportunities, then experience barriers to social and economic participation, develop empathy by examining different perspectives and needs, and finally confront the difficult choices involved in building inclusive communities. Through direct engagement, they discover how different starting conditions influence opportunities, how systemic barriers affect access to resources, and how personal decisions can either reinforce or challenge exclusion.

Mission 1: Pathways to Equality

The learning journey begins by examining how people start life from different positions. Participants create fictional identities with different backgrounds, levels of education, economic situations, and social circumstances. Through a movement-based simulation, they experience how certain advantages or disadvantages accumulate over time, creating unequal access to opportunities.

Participants discover that many opportunities are influenced by factors beyond personal control, such as family background, geographical location, access to education, safety, or discrimination.

Methodologically, this activity provides a concrete and visible representation of inequality, allowing participants to observe differences rather than simply discuss them. The physical distance between participants becomes a powerful illustration of unequal starting conditions.

Mission 2: Break Into the Job Market

After exploring unequal starting points, participants move on to a simulation that illustrates how inequalities continue to affect access to opportunities later in life. In this activity, the job market is represented as a physical barrier that participants must overcome in order to reach employment. The experience allows them to feel how competition, exclusion, privilege, discrimination, and external circumstances can influence access to work.

Participants begin to recognise that success is not determined solely by effort or motivation. Social structures, economic conditions, and access to opportunities also play a significant role.

Methodologically, the activity transforms an abstract social issue into a lived experience. By physically struggling to access the "job", participants gain insights that are often difficult to achieve through discussion alone.

Mission 3: Walk in My Shoes

After experiencing structural inequalities and barriers to opportunity, participants shift their attention to the people behind those experiences. Through discussions and reflection on everyday situations, they explore how emotions, needs, and perspectives influence human interactions and decision-making.

Participants learn that social challenges are not only shaped by systems and structures, but also by individual experiences that often remain invisible to others. By considering different viewpoints, they begin to recognise how empathy can reduce exclusion, strengthen inclusion, and improve relationships within communities.

Methodologically, this activity serves as a bridge between understanding inequality and making ethical decisions. Before participants are asked to evaluate complex social situations, they first develop the ability to look beyond assumptions and understand the needs and experiences of others.

Mission 4: House of Choices

The final mission challenges participants by making decisions that affect others. Placed in the role of a landlord selecting tenants, participants must evaluate competing needs, limited resources, and diverse personal circumstances. They are required to justify their choices and negotiate different perspectives within the group.

Participants are no longer observers of inequality. They become decision-makers whose choices influence inclusion and exclusion. The activity deliberately creates ambiguity and discomfort. There is no objectively correct answer, and participants must confront questions about fairness, diversity, responsibility, and community wellbeing.

Methodologically, this represents the highest level of learning within the sequence. Participants move beyond recognising social justice issues and begin to explore what responsible action looks like when difficult choices must be made.

Mission Matrix Excel Table

The mission catalogue is designed as a practical planning tool that helps moderators select, combine, and adapt activities to their learning objectives, participant needs, available resources, and educational context. The matrix provides key information about each scenario, e.g. including duration, team configuration, space requirements, competence focus, facilitation load, etc. Using this information, moderators can:

- quickly identify activities that fit their available time, space, and resources,
- select missions linked to specific SDGs or learning outcomes,
- balance different methods such as reflection, investigation, storytelling, debate, role-play, and creative production,
- create coherent learning pathways that progressively develop participants' competences,
- assess facilitation requirements and potential wellbeing, safety, or privacy considerations.

Most columns provide straightforward information about the activity, such as its duration, group size, competence focus, pedagogical method, or SDG coverage. Several columns, however, deserve particular attention during the planning process:

- **Team Configuration** indicates how participants should be organised (e.g. single team, whole-group circle, split into two subgroups). This helps moderators anticipate group dynamics and organise activities effectively.
- **Moderator Preparation Level** estimates the amount of preparation required before delivering the activity. This allows moderators to select missions that match their available time, experience, and organisational capacity.
- **Safety, Wellbeing or Privacy Risk** highlights any factors that may require additional attention, such as emotionally sensitive topics, public interactions, physical movement, photography, or online sharing. Reviewing this column in advance helps ensure a safe and positive learning experience for all participants.
- **Competence Focus** can be used when moderators wish to develop particular skills or design learning journeys around specific educational outcomes.

The matrix is intended to support intentional educational design, making it easier to create learning pathways that are both meaningful and appropriate for a specific group and context. It can be used to build journeys around specific SDGs, targeted competences, pedagogical methods, practical constraints, or a combination of these factors.

The Bigger Goal: Becoming an Agent of Change

The Sustainability Mission Lab is designed to go beyond awareness and knowledge. Its purpose is to help participants connect sustainability challenges with their own emotions, values, decisions, and everyday actions. By combining the Sustainable Development Goals with emotional intelligence, the scenarios encourage participants to better understand themselves, engage with others, and recognise their role in creating positive change.

This approach empowers participants to become agents of change: people who turn reflection into action, take responsibility for their choices, inspire others and contribute to more sustainable communities.

Moderator Planning Checklist

Before selecting a mission or a sequence of missions, consider:

- ☐ Is it suitable for my participants?
- ☐ What competences, themes, or SDGs do I want to develop?
- ☐ Do the selected missions create a meaningful learning journey?
- ☐ Are the selected missions appropriate for the group's emotional readiness?
- ☐ Do I have the required space, materials, equipment, and internet access?
- ☐ Have I checked the preparation level, facilitation load, and any wellbeing, safety, or privacy considerations?
- ☐ Have I planned enough time for reflection and feedback?
- ☐ Have I planned an appropriate emotional closure?