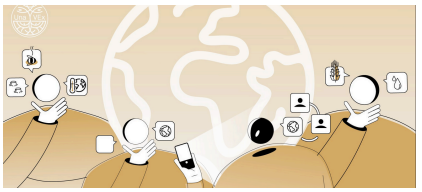
VIRTUAL BRIDGE
BETWEEN EUROPEAN & AFRICAN STUDENTS
FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES



una europa

Una Europa Virtual Exchanges for Sustainability (UnaVEx)

Week program & Sustainability Action task

UnaVex is a five-week-long virtual exchange unit consisting of a total of five sessions. During the virtual exchange, you will attend **inspiring plenary talks** on different perspectives on sustainability. You will also be introduced to your **international small group** and a moderator. In the groups, you will discuss and develop a collaborative, sustainability-themed action task.

UnaVEx offers a versatile look into sustainability – topics of the virtual exchange include:

- Sustainable Development
- Ecological Sustainability
- Social Sustainability
- Economic Sustainability
- Cultural Sustainability
- Taking action for sustainability



No previous sustainability or natural science studies are required. UnaVEx is a platform for **multidisciplinary** and **intercultural** encounters for university students interested in sustainability and the future of our common planet. UnaVEx welcomes students from EU and African nations, building a bridge between the continents for sustainable futures.

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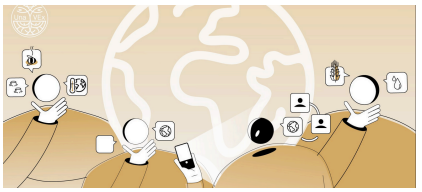
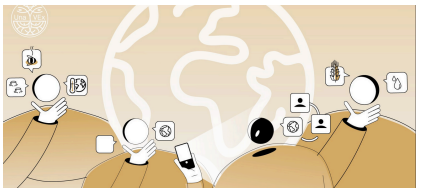


Table of Contents

Instructions for the first day..... 2
Structure of the virtual exchange..... 2
Virtual exchange program..... 3
Group work: Sustainability Action..... 4
Individual report..... 5
Digicampus course page & the virtual exchange materials..... 6
Appendix I Case studies of sustainability action & ideas for online implementation...8

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Instructions for the first day

Before the start of the Virtual Exchange (VE) Week, please, study and familiarise yourself with the materials on DigiCampus online learning platform.

Prior to the 1st day of the VE Week, **prepare to introduce yourself and your thoughts related to sustainability to your small group**. Find also **a sustainability action that took place in your local community** or home country to share with your group members.

Structure of the virtual exchange

The weekly virtual exchange sessions follow the same structure consisting of pre-tasks, plenary sessions and small group activities.

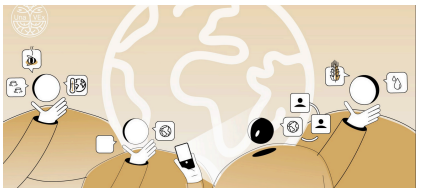
	Pre-task	Introduction to Sustainability MOOC **3 ECTS**	Pre-task	Pre-task	Pre-task
Time/Date	**24.2.2025**	**7.3.2025**	**14.3.2025**	**21.3.2025**	**28.3.2025**
1. Hour	Guest lecture and Q&A discussion	Guest lecture and Q&A discussion	Guest lecture and Q&A discussion	Guest lecture and Q&A discussion	Guest lecture and Q&A discussion
Hours 2-3	Small group activities	Small group activities	Small group activities	Small group activities	Small group activities

Planning and implementing the collaborative *Sustainability action*

Indivdual study report

1 ECTS

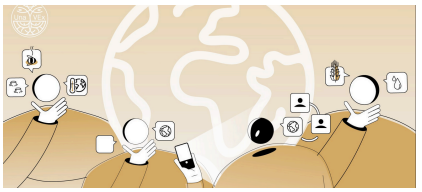
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Virtual exchange program

Date	Time	Plenary topic & guest speaker	Group activity
24.2.2025	12–15 (Bologna, Kinshasa, Leuven) 13–16 (Helsinki, Johannesburg) 14–17 (Nairobi)	Introduction to UnaVEx & the MOOCS	• Getting to know one another and brainstorming your group's *Sustainability action task.* • **Pre-task:** Find a sustainability action that took place in your local community or home country to share with your group members.
7.3.2025	12–15 (Bologna, Kinshasa, Leuven) 13–16 (Helsinki, Johannesburg) 14–17 (Nairobi)	Sustainable Development as a Concept and in Politics Guest: Tarja Halonen, the former president of Finland	• Discussion on the day's topic • Continue planning the *Sustainability Action* task. • **Pre-task**: Complete the *Introduction to Sustainability* MOOC
14.3.2025	12–15 (Bologna, Kinshasa, Leuven) 13–16 (Helsinki, Johannesburg) 14–17 (Nairobi)	Ecological sustainability Guest: Professor Daniel Olago, ICCA University of Nairobi	• Discussion on the day's topic: reflect on your Sustainability action in terms of ecological sustainability. • Draft your practical implementation action plan (local individual actions/online format). • **Pre-task**: start implementing your group's Sustainability Action.
21.3.2025	12–15 (Bologna, Kinshasa, Leuven) 13–16 (Helsinki, Johannesburg) 14–17 (Nairobi)	Social and economic sustainability Guest: Evans Njewa, Least Developed Countries' lead climate negotiator on climate finance	• Discussion on the day's topic: reflect your action plan in terms of social sustainability. • Update the process and advance the task if possible online. • **Pre-task**: Continue implementing your group's *Sustainability Action*.

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28.3.2025	12–15 (Bologna, Kinshasa, Leuven) 13–16 (Helsinki, Johannesburg) 14–17 (Nairobi)	Cultural sustainability Guest: Ezio Manzini, author and design academic in social innovation and sustainability design	• Discussion on the day's topic; reflect your action in terms of cultural sustainability. • Reflect and finalize the *Sustainability Action* task. • Fill in the feedback survey. Joint closing session • **Pre-task**: Create a summary of your sustainability action task.

Group work: *Sustainability Action*

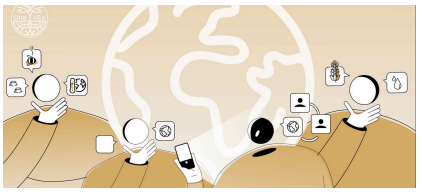
The Sustainability Action task is a collaborative effort to find feasible ways to tackle a chosen sustainability challenge. Guided by the moderator, your group can decide on the topic and implementation of the *Sustainability Action.* You may approach the exercise using a so-called glocal approach, where you will collaboratively plan the action, and everyone will implement it in their local communities. Your group may also choose to do, for example, an online implementation. Your group will have a *Miro* interactive virtual board to help plan and workshop the task.

Sustainability action group task builds on the **pedagogy of concrete utopias** (Rajala et al., 2021; 2023). The starting point of concrete utopias is to imagine alternative visions of the world, i.e., what is unsustainable in the current world and if this were to change, how would the world (or society, university, village…) look like then? Through the sustainability action, your group designs and implements feasible ways to make your group's vision of a more sustainable world concrete.

The idea of a concrete utopia is to leverage the actual potentials for change in an existing activity (Rajala et al., 2023)

During the weekly small group discussions, you will advance the action by reporting and reflecting on your local processes or for instance, working on your virtual implementation. *The action you will do should somehow engage or reach people beyond the UnaVEx participants*. You may do this by advocating or using social media, for instance.

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To help ideate the *Sustainability action,* see **Appendix I** for case studies of sustainability-related action around the world. At the end of the virtual exchange, your group will present the sustainability action process on a Miro Board that will be shared to all UnaVEx participants.

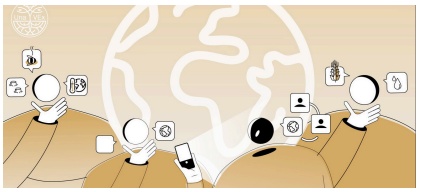
Individual report

At the end of the virtual exchange, write a brief 1-3-page report where you reflect on the virtual exchange and your group's sustainability action task. This assignment can resemble a learning diary rather than a scientific report.
You may use these questions as your guidelines:

Have you changed the way you look at yourself as a result of this exchange?
Did this virtual exchange challenge some of your firmly held ideas?
Have you changed your normal way of doing things?
Have you discovered faults in what you had previously believed to be right?
Were some of your viewpoints challenged?
Did you have to look closely at your own values during the virtual exchange?
Did you become aware of the perspectives of others?
Have you adopted new ways of thinking about sustainability?

Grading: pass/fail

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Digicampus course page & the virtual exchange materials

UnaVEx uses *the Digicampus* online learning platform. There, you will access all the materials and instructions you need to complete the virtual exchange, including:

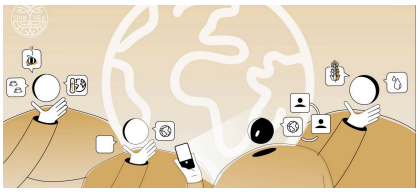
- News forum about the course practicalities
- Your group number
- Lecture recordings and PowerPoint presentations of the virtual exchange sessions
- The Zoom link
- Folder for returning the individual course report

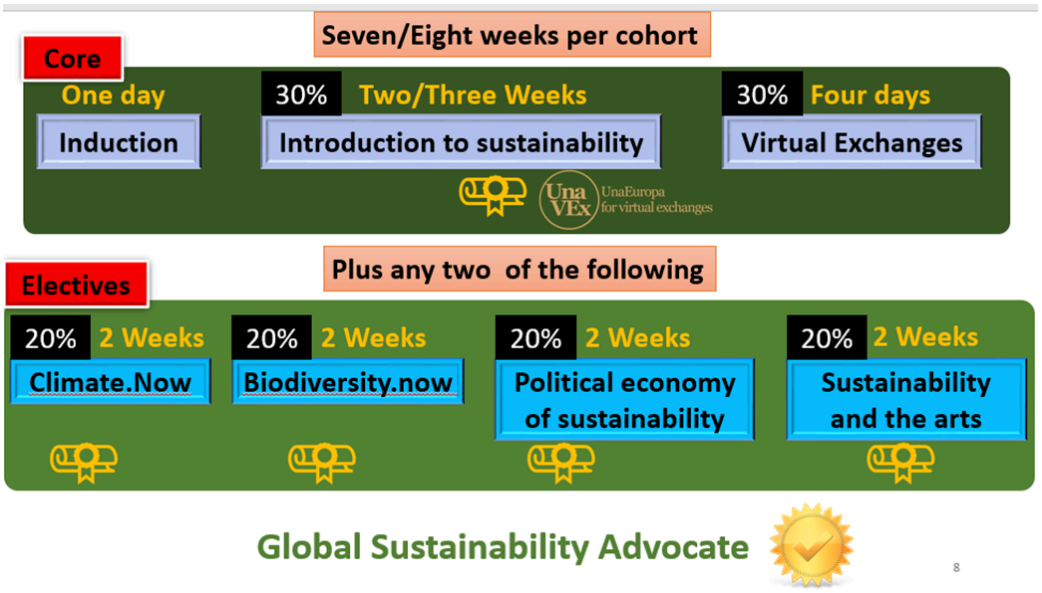
After the virtual exchange: Becoming a Global Sustainability Advocate

To become a *Global Sustainability Advocate*, you will need to complete the following:

1. **Virtual Exchange Program**: Participate in five online sessions (each 2-3 hours), earning 1 Credit Point.
2. **Introduction to Sustainability MOOC**: Complete this foundational course (worth 3 ECTS) via the University of Helsinki's online learning platform. Access the course here.
3. **Optional Una Europa MOOC**: Choose and complete two additional MOOC from the Una Europa Micro-credential in Sustainability program. Browse the courses here.

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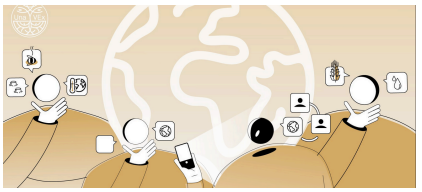




This combination of courses and virtual exchange will equip you with the foundational knowledge and practical skills needed to advocate for sustainability on a global scale.

By participating in the Virtual Exchange, you will receive a certificate of completion and earn one credit, regardless of additional coursework.

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Appendix I Case studies of sustainability action & ideas for online implementation

This section presents case studies to inspire workshopping your group's *Sustainability action.* Find ideas for online implementation at the end.

1. Sustainability initiatives at universities – the glocal approach (1)

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
https://news.vt.edu/articles/2024/09/facilities-green-rfp.html

- Students developed a proposal for an LED lighting upgrade in the University premises.
- Students participated in the restoration efforts of a creek that crosses the campus area
- The Initiatives are sent through 'Green Request for Proposal (RFP) Program.'
- "By collaborating with local organizations, faculty, staff, and students can work together to address pressing issues in their communities, such as environmental restoration and social equity."→ importance of partnerships

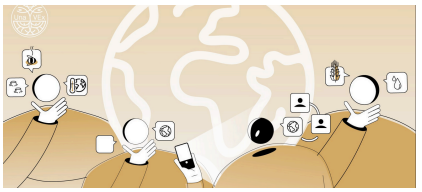
Penn State University
https://www.forwardpathway.us/student-led-sustainability-initiatives-in-american-universities

- Students developed a project to promote waste reduction during home football games by directly engaging with the fans. They did this by educating on recycling (poster) and gamification (turning recycling into a game).

University of Galway
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r075pEs52Ow&t=65s&ab_channel=ENLIGHTEU

- *Glassary* sustainability initiative developed by students for recycling old household items in student accommodations. Donation points for household items were set-up at student residences at the end of each semester, where students could donate their leftover items (kitchen supplies, books …) when moving out. These items are then collected and re-distributed to future student residents or local organisations. Glassary reduced household waste

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generated across campus accommodation residences, whilst simultaneously providing support to local community and voluntary organisations.

Green Africa Youth Organization (GAYO)
https://greenafricayouth.com/2014/08/19/upcoming/

- The group has organized different kinds of sustainability projects, for instance an event called *Volunteers' Day Beach Clean Up* for taking care of a local beach in Cape Coast, Ghana.

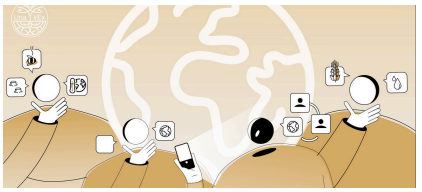
Great Big Green Week, UK
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a21SOrNiNGU

- Great Big Green Week the UK's largest celebration of community-led climate action. The video features a green tour across Wales, joined by volunteers and Climate Cymru staff.

Univeristy bodies to promote sustainability – an opportunity to collaborate via UnaVEx. For example:

- KU Leuven
  - *Green office* at KU Leuven is a platform for students and staff to develop ideas, launch projects and start collaborations. Green office aims to make the university more sustainable from the inside out. https://www.kuleuven.be/duurzaamheid/sustainability/greenofficeforkuleuven/aboutus
    - Discover the topics they focus on (circularity, mobility, food and nutrition, biodiversity, conscious consumerism, waste, energy) https://www.kuleuven.be/duurzaamheid/sustainability/greenofficeforkuleuven/greenofficeforkuleuven
    - Their initiatives for education for sustainable development (Green Talk podcast, Future Proef Award, Science shop) https://www.kuleuven.be/duurzaamheid/sustainability/get-more-out-of-your-thesis
  - *Ecoteams* is group of committed colleagues and students that wants to make the workplace more sustainable https://www.kuleuven.be/duurzaamheid/sustainability/ecoteams

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Does your home university have a body like this?

Ideas for the online implementation

- A science-based policy recommendation (solution) to a chosen sustainability issue
- Sustainable business idea - 'pitch' for a solution
- A blog post on UNAVEX/University page
- A blog post-type summary of news events or published papers related to sustainability, an example: https://sustainability-roundup.beehiiv.com/p/main-takeaways-latest-ipcc-report
- The UN app https://actnow.aworld.org/ guides conducting small climate tasks and tracking own behavior e.g., the 'One million actions for our common future' challenge. Write a collaborative text on the process.
- Look for environmental campaigns to sign (e.g., WWF, Greenpeace, a local organization ...) and write a critical report or presentation on the issue your group will (or chooses not to) contribute to and why.
- Social media campaign
- Carbon footprint calculator tool
- Advocate someone in your community about sustainability, exchanging ideas about sustainability, resistance

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