

Sustainability Report ISM 2024/2025

ISM
INTERNATIONAL
SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
University of Applied Sciences

Dortmund · Frankfurt/Main · Munich · Hamburg · Cologne · Stuttgart · Berlin · Distance Learning



International.
Individual.
Inspiring.

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Vision & Mission

Statement of the President

As an international business school, we carry a profound responsibility — not only to generate knowledge, but to ensure that knowledge serves a sustainable and just future. Our sustainability initiative is more than a project; it is a commitment to rethink how we teach, research, and operate. We are integrating sustainability into every layer of our institution—from energy and mobility to curriculum design and campus culture.

This transformation requires courage, persistence, and cooperation. Together with our students, staff, and partners, we are shaping a university that lives up to its values—transparent in its progress, ambitious in its goals, and accountable to the next generation.

Sustainability is not an end state, but a continuous journey. I invite every member of our community to walk this path with us—critically, creatively, and with the confidence that real change begins right here.”

Prof. Dr. Audrey Mehn
President



1 Governance & Strategy

The International School of Management (ISM) understands sustainability as an integral component of its institutional development. As one of the few universities of applied sciences in Germany, ISM has been accredited according to the prestigious AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) standards. This accreditation requires ISM to design its educational programs in a way that contributes to the long-term well-being of the economy, society, and the environment.

University governance supports this approach through clearly defined structures. At the executive level, a Vice President for Transfer, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship & Innovation is responsible for strategic oversight, complemented by a sustainability team that—under rotating leadership—advances key sustainability topics with the support of faculty and administrative staff across all ISM campuses. The team monitors progress in regular meetings.

Sustainable values and objectives are firmly embedded in ISM's mission statement, statutes, and institutional development plan, providing a binding framework for all areas of the university. A strong culture of involvement and participation is fostered through the active engagement of students, staff, and external stakeholders.

Initiatives such as ISM Hamburg's designation as a Fairtrade University or cooperations at the Berlin campus with partners like Haufe and Econsense illustrate how sustainability can be implemented in practice and anchored

within society. Transparency, reporting, and compliance are ensured through regular sustainability reports and alignment with international standards such as the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME).

In research and teaching, sustainability and ethical conduct are deeply integrated—for example, through an ethics committee and adherence to international standards required within AACSB accreditation, as well as by embedding sustainability across the entire curriculum. This commitment is further supported by proactive risk management and a sustainable procurement policy that equally considers ecological, social, and economic criteria.

For the academic years 2025/2026, the university will focus on key topics such as digital sustainability, circular economy, social transformation, and corporate responsibility in teaching, research, and practice.

The 2024–2025 report documents the progress, projects, and initiatives implemented in line with the PRME principles, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the AACSB accreditation requirements.

“

Sustainability is a core element of ISM's strategic orientation. As a university, we see it as our responsibility to consistently integrate economic, environmental and social aspects into teaching, research, knowledge exchange and campus operations. In doing so, we empower our students to act responsibly and actively contribute to the transformation towards a more sustainable economy and society.



Prof. Dr. Bakr Fadl
Vice President Transfer, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship & Innovation

”

1.1 Sustainability Structure & Leadership

University Management

The governance structure includes the Executive Board, composed of representatives of teaching and research, and Prof. Dr. Bakr Fadl as Vice President for Transfer, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship & Innovation, alongside the Quality Management department and representatives from administration.

Head of university



Prof. Dr. Audrey Mehn
President, Managing Director



Daisuke Motoki
Vice President Corporate Relations,
Managing Director



Karsten Gardy
Vice President Economic & Financial Affairs,
Managing Director



Prof. Dr. Gerrit Lietz
Vice President Teaching



Prof. Dr. Kai Rommel
Vice President Research



Prof. Dr. Jens Brandt
Vice President Digital Transformation &
Quality Management



Carolin Krabs
Vice President International Relations



Prof. Dr. Bakr Fadl
Vice President Transfer, Sustainability,
Entrepreneurship & Innovation



Anja Bergmann
Vice President Organization

Sustainability team

The ISM Sustainability Team, led in 2025/2026 by Prof. Dr. Nicole Fabisch, continues to serve as the central interface for governance and strategic steering. It coordinates and documents campus-specific initiatives and drives sustainable development in close collaboration with the university's executive leadership.

Campus team



Campus Berlin
Prof. Dr. Brigitte Spieß
Head of the Institute for Sustainable Transformation



Campus Dortmund
Prof. Dr. Kai Rommel
Vice President for Research



Campus Frankfurt
Prof. Dr. Sven Wyrwa
Professor of Accounting & Taxation



Campus Hamburg
Prof. Dr. Nicole Fabisch
Professor of Marketing & Sustainability Management



Campus Cologne
Prof. Dr. Jens Perret
Professor of Economics & Statistics



Campus Munich
Prof. Dr. Dieter M. Schlesinger
Professor of Sustainable Development



Campus Stuttgart
Prof. Dr. André Reichel
Professor of International Management & Sustainability

Both the regional responsibilities and the interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues from various academic fields and administrative units clearly demonstrate that ISM regards sustainability as an integral component of its institutional mission—actively advancing it as a cross-cutting theme across all disciplines.

Our commitment towards

...students, alumni and business partners: We aim to enable our students and alumni to acquit themselves well in the business world by providing them with an outstanding education. We are a reliable partner for our students and business partners at all times. We always keep our promises.

...our staff: We value an entrepreneurial and results-driven mindset among our staff. An atmosphere which facilitates clear communication with employees, encourages staff engagement and the transfer of responsibility is of crucial importance. We offer our staff the opportunity to enhance their personal skills and encourage them to make the most of their talent. The university management provides the management tools and equipment needed to help our staff do their work. Under no circumstances do we tolerate intimidation or threats, violent behaviour, physical threats, sexual harassment or discrimination in interpersonal communication.

...university property: We are committed to using university funds in a prudent and effective manner. University property may only be used for business purposes that are permissible under law. We protect the interests of our owners and therefore regard the long-term continuity of our university as our overriding goal.

...public authorities: We strive to maintain a cooperative relationship with all the competent authorities. Any information provided to a supervisory authority must be truthful and free of errors, and it must effectively protect the justified interests of the ISM.

...the general public: All statements made by the ISM are complete, objective, substantively correct, clear and timely. The ISM respects the professional independence of journalists and the media. We are all viewed as representatives of the ISM in everything we do. This is something we need to internalize every single day. Conduct which damages our reputation will not be tolerated. As our work helps to present the ISM in a positive light, we also support the business success of the university.

...the environment: Our goal is to reduce any detrimental effects our activities might have on the environment.

Every single stakeholder is challenged to compare his or her own conduct with the principles set forth in this Code of Conduct. Violations of the Code of Conduct may have disciplinary consequences and be sanctioned under labour law. The university management is responsible, within the ISM, for ensuring that all university members have been informed in full about the Code of Conduct and that this Code is implemented and complied with.

Every stakeholder's conduct should be exemplary within the meaning of the Code of Conduct. Should any questions arise regarding the contents of the Code of Conduct and its interpretation, or if the Code has been violated, university members should consult their superiors or contact the university management directly.

If a university member becomes aware of a situation which, in his or her opinion, is inconsistent with this Code of Conduct, he or she must notify the university management without delay. The ISM will regularly review compliance with the Code of Conduct. Responsibility for punishing violations lies with the university management.

Code of Conduct

Our code of conduct refers to the following topics:

Protecting integrity: We treat our students, staff and business partners fairly. We set high standards of honesty and ethical behaviour in everything we do, and we accentuate the importance of individual responsibility.

Treating people with respect: We afford equal, fair and respectful treatment to all students, staff and business partners, irrespective of their nation origin, disability, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity or age.

Protecting privacy: We protect the confidentiality of personal data about students, staff, business partners and other individuals.

Protecting intellectual property: Academic honesty is essential for interacting among scholars. This includes respecting the intellectual property of others.

That is why action will be taken against behavior in which

- Individuals misrepresent the work of a group or of others as their own, regardless of whether the work was rendered entirely or only in part by others,
- One and the same piece of work is submitted for more than one examination, or
- Individuals directly or indirectly cite sources without documenting the author and evaluating whether the source is a genuine one.

Preventing conflicts of interest: The personal interest of salaried and freelance ISM staff members must be clearly segregated from those of the university. A conflict of interest arises when personal interests clash, in one way or another, with those of the ISM. Work by students may not be used for purposes other than those for which such work was rendered as part of their study.

Preventing corruption: The ISM is firmly opposed to the bribery of business partners in the form of cash, valuables or other undue advantages. It is prohibited to solicit, demand, be promised, accept or grant cash, valuables or other undue advantages as consideration for sourcing products or other services. Benefits such as token business gifts or business entertainment may only be accepted within the confines of customary business practices and as long as they are incapable of influencing any decisions made by the university or its owners. These types of benefits may only be granted within the confines of normal customer relations as long as they cannot be regarded as an attempt to gain undue influence.



1.2 Memberships & Awards

AACSB

In 2024, ISM received the prestigious AACSB accreditation—a highly selective hallmark of academic excellence. The AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) stands for the highest quality standards in teaching, research, and academic administration. It obliges universities to continuously promote responsible management thinking and to reflect on their societal impact. Sustainability plays a central role in this context: AACSB explicitly emphasizes ethical conduct, social responsibility, and the sustainable use of resources in education and research.



By adhering to AACSB standards, ISM reinforces its responsibility toward students, staff, and society as a whole. The AACSB accreditation seal thus also becomes a symbol of sustainable quality assurance, responsible leadership, and long-term impact in support of future-oriented university development.

PRME

Since 2015, ISM has been a member of the international **United Nations initiative Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)**.



PRME was founded under the umbrella of the UN Global Compact to systematically integrate sustainability, ethics, and social responsibility into management and business education. Its aim is to equip future leaders with the ability to make decisions that support a sustainable, inclusive, and responsible economy.

As a private university of applied sciences, ISM participates actively in this global network of higher education institutions that embed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into teaching, research, and university management. Membership promotes international exchange on topics such as sustainable corporate governance, ethics in teaching and research, and the societal impact of education.

Through its PRME membership, ISM can adopt best practices and innovative teaching concepts from the international PRME community, showcase its own contributions to responsible management education, and strengthen the global visibility of its sustainability strategy. In doing so, the university makes a concrete contribution to shaping a future-oriented economy and society.

Foundation Development and Climate Alliance

Since summer 2025, ISM has been an institutional member of the Foundation Development and Climate Alliance. With this step, ISM reaffirms its long-term commitment to climate protection and sustainable development. The membership enables the university to further strengthen its sustainability strategy and to support effective measures for the avoidance, reduction, and compensation of greenhouse gas emissions.

Through its collaboration with the foundation, ISM promotes internationally recognized climate protection projects that also contribute to sustainable development in particularly affected regions. The membership forms part of our holistic sustainability approach, which integrates ecological responsibility with entrepreneurial action. Our goal is to actively contribute to achieving global climate targets and to continuously and transparently improve our climate impact.

In addition, ISM supports the foundation as an academic partner, developing tailored workshop formats for the foundation's institutional

**FOUNDATION
Development
and Climate
Alliance**



members. These workshops aim to make current research findings accessible for practical application and to help integrate these insights into their respective sustainability efforts.

Fairtrade University Hamburg

Since 2023, the ISM Hamburg campus has been recognized as a "Fairtrade University"—currently the only higher education institution in Hamburg to hold this title. In early 2025, the certification was successfully renewed through 2027. Fairtrade Germany awards this distinction in recognition of ISM Hamburg's ongoing commitment to fair trade and global responsibility.

To achieve the renewal, numerous activities were implemented, including fair-trade breakfasts, information events, and participation in the Fairtrade University Competition, which Prof. Dr. Nicole Fabisch and her teams have won several times. The goal is to raise awareness among students and staff about the social and environmental challenges of global supply chains and to make fair trading structures visible.

Certification as a Fairtrade University requires a formal university resolution, the establishment of a steering group, and the regular use and promotion of Fairtrade products in campus events and public communications.



The project thrives on the dedication of staff and students who contribute creatively and actively to greater fairness in trade.

“

We are proud that our university has once again been awarded the title of Fairtrade University. This recognition underscores our commitment to social responsibility and to supporting workers and farmers in the Global South through fair trade, sustainable practices, and a dedication to global justice.

”

Prof. Dr. Nicole Fabisch,
Head of the Fairtrade Steering Committee



**We Remain Outstanding:
Title Renewal 2025–2027**

2 University Operations

2.1 Ecological Sustainability & Responsible Resource Use

As a university, we take responsibility for the social, ecological, and economic impacts of our actions. Our goal is to make all areas of university operations—from procurement and resource consumption to campus design—progressively more sustainable.

Systematic Development of University Operations

We have begun a process of systematically reviewing and further developing our university operations based on ecological and social criteria. Although only a few measurable indicators (KPIs) are currently available, important initial progress has already been made.

Resource Conservation and Energy Efficiency

A key focus lies in reducing resource consumption and improving energy efficiency. Paper use has been significantly reduced—primarily because bachelor's theses are now submitted and distributed exclusively in digital form. Additionally, space utilization has been optimized at the Hamburg and Cologne campuses, reducing energy needs for operations and infrastructure. At the Frankfurt campus, new energy-efficient elevators were installed, which noticeably reduce electricity consumption while improving accessibility.

Providing office space and classrooms that are only sparsely used binds resources and results in unnecessary energy consumption. To address this, the Cologne campus area was reduced, and a mobile desk solution was introduced for professors. This approach not only improves space efficiency but also strengthens social interaction between faculty and administrative staff.

Sustainable Procurement and Fairtrade Engagement

Another key element of ecological responsibility is sustainable and fair procurement. At the Hamburg campus in particular, procurement is now carried out entirely on a Fairtrade basis. This contributes not only to environmental and resource protection but also to fair trading practices and social justice along global supply chains.

Sustainable Mobility and Equal Opportunities in the Erasmus+ Program

The ISM International Office promotes sustainability and social responsibility within the Erasmus+ program. One special focus is on supporting environmentally friendly travel. Through the Green Travel funding scheme, students are encouraged to choose sustainable modes of transportation—such as trains or long-distance buses—for their semester abroad or international internship. In 2024, 23 outgoing students used this option; in 2025, the number increased to 25. This helps reduce CO2 emissions and raises awareness of climate-friendly mobility.

Alongside ecological responsibility, social sustainability also plays a crucial role. Through the Fewer Opportunities funding scheme, students with limited financial means, chronic illnesses, or family obligations receive targeted support to ensure equitable access to international education. During the reporting period, 47 students benefited from this support in 2024 and 67 students in 2025. In this way, the International Office actively contributes to making international mobility more inclusive and more sustainable.

Nothing is impossible:
For his semester abroad, Master's student Jasper
Hawkrige travelled all the way to Norway by bicycle!



Treedom Tree Planting Certificates

At the Hamburg campus, guest lecturers receive a Fairtrade-labeled gift (such as a bottle of wine or chocolates) in recognition of ISM's Fairtrade University status. At all other campuses, they receive a tree planting certificate from Treedom. Treedom is the first web-based platform that allows users to plant a tree and follow the story of its project online. Since its founding in 2010, more than 4,000,000 trees have been planted in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Italy. All trees are cared for directly by local communities and provide both ecological and social benefits. With this business model, Treedom has been part of the Certified B Corporations since 2014—a global network of companies committed to strong social and environmental impact.

ISM has donated 4,000 trees, including papaya, avocado, markhamia, white mangrove, tephrosia, cocoa, and cashew. Together, these trees store approximately 903.33 tons of CO₂ and were planted in the following countries:

- Colombia: 800
- Madagascar: 720
- Tanzania: 610
- Guatemala: 510
- Kenya: 400
- Haiti: 360
- Cameroon: 200
- Ecuador: 200
- Nepal: 200



Outlook

These measures represent important steps toward a resource-efficient, socially responsible, and future-oriented university development strategy. In the future, additional environmental indicators will be collected and specific targets defined to make progress measurable and to anchor ecological sustainability firmly within the university's strategic framework.

4,000

Trees

-903.33 t

CO₂



2.2 Social Sustainability & Responsibility in the University Context

The social dimension of sustainability is a central pillar of ISM's institutional development. Our aim is to create an inclusive, equitable, and healthy environment for students, staff, and faculty—regardless of background, life circumstances, or location.

Diversity and Accessibility

ISM understands diversity as the recognition of different personal backgrounds and life situations. This includes age, cultural and linguistic heritage, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, physical and mental abilities, and social or cultural experiences. This understanding explicitly includes meeting the needs of people with disabilities or chronic illnesses in order to ensure equal opportunities.

Intercultural diversity is considered an essential element of academic quality at ISM. Based on this conviction, the university creates an environment in which students and staff can develop their potential and work and study within a diverse, supportive community.

Diversity and equal opportunity are promoted at all ISM locations. Since 2025, ISM has been led by President Audrey Mehn and two Vice Presidents, Anja Bergmann and Karolin Krabs. Campus accessibility continues to improve: Frankfurt has been modernized with new energy-efficient elevators, and the campuses in Hamburg, Cologne, Stuttgart, Munich, Berlin, and Dortmund are also barrier-free.

Balancing Studies, Family, and Career

For students with children, caregiving responsibilities, or health-related limitations, ISM offers flexible solutions such as leave semesters while still allowing selected coursework to be completed. Financial equity is promoted through scholarships such as the Deutschlandstipendium and the ISM Scholarship, both supporting students regardless of background or gender.

The ISM distance-learning program contributes to ecological, social, and economic sustainability in several ways. Because no physical attendance is required, commuting for students and lecturers is eliminated, reducing transportation-related emissions as well as space and resource demands for campus operations. Digital learning formats also reduce paper consumption and overall environmental impact. Innovations developed within the distance-learning program increasingly flow into on-campus teaching, supporting digitalization and reducing resource usage across the university.

Flexible, location-independent study models make higher education more

accessible to individuals with diverse personal or professional circumstances. In this way, ISM's distance-learning approach fosters responsible educational practices and supports sustainable development within a modern digital learning ecosystem.

Student Advisory Services – Guidance with Responsibility

Since 2025, ISM has strengthened its sustainable advisory services to support students not only in choosing a degree program but throughout their entire educational journey—holistically and responsibly. The focus is on self-reflection, values-based decision-making, future skills, and long-term support that enhances resilience and reduces drop-out rates.

Through interdisciplinary collaboration with companies and organizations, a values-based, future-oriented partnership network has been developed, further supported by Study Coaches.

To improve student support, the Customer Experience Management department was created, bundling communication, feedback, and service offerings to enhance the quality of support for students and alumni. These efforts demonstrate ISM's commitment to integrating social responsibility into everyday university life. In the future, suitable indicators will be established to measure and further refine the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Organizational Culture and Staff Development

With the introduction of a new corporate culture and a four-member management team, ISM promotes transparency, participation, and flatter hierarchies. Internal training opportunities via Moodle have been expanded, and the overall portfolio of continuing education programs has grown. Employees also benefit from enhanced corporate benefits through additional services offered by the ESO Group.

Health, Safety, and Well-Being

Occupational safety remains a high priority at ISM. Additionally, physical and mental well-being is supported through partnerships with fitness clubs at several campuses, offering reduced rates for students and staff.

International Student Development and Intercultural Integration

The number of international students at ISM has increased significantly in recent years. Growth among students from India has been particularly strong: from 170 in 2023 to 541 in 2025, now forming the largest international group. The number of students from China remained stable at 148 (2023) and 142 (2025). Students from France, Italy, and Turkey also continue to contribute notably to ISM's international profile. While the number of French students decreased slightly (44 to 33), Italian enrollment remained stable (27 to 28), and Turkish student numbers grew to 40 in 2025.

ISM also welcomes students from countries such as Brazil, Ghana, Nepal, Togo, and Cameroon—highlighting the university's increasing attractiveness to young people beyond Europe and Asia.

This development reflects ISM's growing international orientation and underscores its commitment to cultural diversity, openness, and social sustainability in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The rise in international student numbers enriches campus culture at all ISM locations. To foster intercultural exchange, the Student Council has been strengthened, the Buddy Program expanded, and targeted integration initiatives established.

Buddy Program – Social Sustainability in Action on Campus

The ISM Buddy Program creates a bridge between international and local students. It fosters intercultural encounters, mutual learning, and social cohesion—key elements of social sustainability. ISM students support incoming international peers upon arrival in Germany, assist with administrative matters, and help them integrate into academic and daily life. Through shared activities, long-lasting friendships and cultural learning spaces emerge.

At the Dortmund campus, the Wel(l)come Lounge was opened—a meeting place centered on well-being and community. Here, students can enjoy free tea and coffee on the condition that they drink it on-site, encouraging conversation, connection, and a welcoming atmosphere. The offer is complemented by weekly Intercultural Breaks, yoga sessions, and other activities that promote mindfulness, exchange, and a sense of belonging.

To strengthen relationships between German and international students, International Lunches are hosted regularly at all campuses, providing opportunities for both groups to connect and learn about each other's cultures.



2.3 Economic Sustainability & Responsible Corporate Governance

For us, economic sustainability means combining financial success with social responsibility and ecological foresight. Our aim is to create long-term stable structures that foster innovation, fairness, and future viability in equal measure.

Responsible Governance and Sustainable Growth

Our corporate governance is guided by the principles of transparency, integrity, and accountability. Decisions are made with consideration for long-term sustainability objectives to balance economic stability, academic quality in teaching and research, and social and ecological responsibility. Investments in modern learning infrastructures, digital transformation, and continuous professional development strengthen the university's future viability and reinforce its competitive position within the higher education landscape.

Fair and Responsible Procurement

A central field of action is fair and sustainable procurement. We ensure that our suppliers and service partners are selected based on ecological and social criteria. At the Hamburg campus, procurement has already been fully converted to Fairtrade standards; in the medium term, this principle will be extended to other campuses. Through this approach, we contribute to fairer global trade structures and support producers around the world.

Support for Business Start-ups

ISM strengthens entrepreneurship through several initiatives designed to promote sustainable start-ups. By 2024, EaaS@ISM established university-wide structures for start-up support, complemented by specialized programs for skill development and networking. Since 2024, the EmpowerHER program has supported female founders each year and promotes diversity in entrepreneurship. The ISM Startup Competition highlights innovative early-stage ideas and regularly honors sustainability-focused projects. The newly founded Innoclub Dortmund provides space for students to develop their own business ideas and combines mentoring, networking, and sustainability-oriented guidance.



ISM alumna Mahsa Yarahmadi, co-founder of CliniTech
2nd place in ISM Startup Competition 2024

3 Teaching & Research

3.1 Degree Programs and Continuing Education with a Focus on Sustainability

ISM consistently pursues its strategic goal of further embedding sustainability in research and teaching. Within the **Research Institute for Sustainable Transformation**, topics such as sustainable corporate management, sustainability assessment, and future-oriented business models are addressed.

Since the winter semester 2025, sustainability has been explicitly integrated into the revised **B.Sc. International Management** program, in which sustainability topics are addressed across nearly all modules. In addition, the curriculum includes dedicated modules focused exclusively on sustainability and responsible business practices—for example, the bachelor's module **Sustainability Management & Business Ethics** or master's modules such as **Corporate Governance & Business Ethics**.

Beyond this, ISM offers degree programs specifically centered on sustainability:

M.A. Sustainability & Business Transformation

A full-time master's program focused on sustainability management and business transformation. It emphasizes sustainability, circular economy, digital business models, and corporate responsibility. It is designed for graduates with a bachelor's degree in business, management, environmental sciences, or related fields.

M.A. Sustainability Mgmt. (Distance Learning)

The distance-learning master's program provides practical and academically grounded knowledge on how sustainable transformations within companies and organizations can be strategically shaped. It targets professionals seeking to position sustainability as a central area of action and take active responsibility. With flexible online formats and up-to-date content, the program strengthens sustainability competencies across business and society.

M.Sc. Management – Sustainability Management

This part-time master's program is aimed at professionals seeking to combine sustainability management with management competencies. Content includes sustainable business models, environmental and social responsibility, reporting and assessment, and leading sustainable organizations. The study model includes a language module in Dublin and offers an optional double degree with prestigious international universities such as Edinburgh Napier University, Boston University, or City University of Seattle.

Certificate Program “Sustainable Transformation & Reporting”

Updated for the September 2024 intake and continuing with lecturers Dr. Jana Heinze, Dr. Claas Oehlmann (BDI), and Prof. Dr. Brigitte Spieß, this program provides valuable insights through three online modules. Topics include integrated reporting and holistic sustainability integration, circular value creation (strategic implementation & reporting), and resilient supply chains with human rights due diligence. The certificate is offered each spring and autumn through the ISM Academy for professionals and executives.

Certificate Course “Sustainability Manager (ISM)”

In spring 2025, ISM—together with bwcon—launched the first certificate course “Sustainability Manager (ISM)”, aimed at professionals wishing to embed sustainability strategically within their organizations. Across several modules—ranging from the foundations of sustainable development and CSR to environmental management, sustainability strategy, and communication—experts provided both theoretical insight and practical tools. Participants learned to align ecological, social, and economic aspects and to actively shape transformation processes as change agents. ISM will continue offering this and similar programs in the coming years in close cooperation with industry partners—contributing to ISM's mission of promoting responsible management and sustainable economic practices.

3.2 Sustainability and Application-Oriented Teaching

Beyond the systematic integration of sustainability topics into lectures, numerous additional initiatives by individual faculty members bring sustainability to life in practical, application-based contexts with corporate partners. Through these activities, ISM advances its strategic goal of continuously increasing the number of sustainability-focused learning experiences.

Excursion to the Creators of the World's Largest Cargo Bike

As part of an excursion, master's students in the International Logistics & Supply Chain Management program, together with Prof. Dr. Dagmar Tomanek, visited the company Cargo Cycle in Hamburg. The highlight was the NANUK MEGALINER—the world's longest cargo bike, with a loading volume of 4,000 liters. Students gained exciting insights into urban logistics solutions.

Frederike Claus, ISM alumna and now Managing Director at Cargo Cycle, accompanied the group throughout the day. For many participants, the visit sparked a deeper interest in sustainable logistics solutions—both academically and in their future careers.

Students test the world's longest cargo bike themselves



Students present solutions for reducing returns at Tchibo's headquarters



Sustainability through Process Optimization – Students Develop Solutions to Reduce Returns at Tchibo

In the master's program International Logistics & Supply Chain Management, students carried out a practical project with Tchibo during the summer semester of 2025. Under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Dagmar Tomanek, the project focused on optimizing return processes in online retail—a topic of growing ecological and economic relevance.

A thorough analysis of the current situation, supplemented by benchmarks and academic research, led to concrete recommendations for reducing return rates and promoting sustainable consumer behavior. The project demonstrates impressively how scientific methods and business practice can work hand in hand to achieve tangible sustainability goals.

Visit to eBay: The Pre-Loved and Reselling Market

Students from the International School of Management (ISM), together with Prof. Dr. Christiane Beyerhaus, visited the headquarters of eBay Germany and gained valuable insights into the pre-loved and reselling market. The visit highlighted the central role eBay plays as a global marketplace—active in 190 markets, with 47 national platforms and more than 132 million active buyers worldwide.

During a workshop, students analyzed the conditions brands must meet in order to succeed on eBay. Key factors include credible brand rebranding, efficient process structures—such as in returns management—and the strategic use of eBay's large community as a multiplier for reach and brand building.

As part of a market research project, the participants also investigated what makes brands attractive to Generation Y and Z. In addition to user-friendly technology and affordability, transparency, ethical behavior, and sustainability emerged as decisive factors. Clothing should be produced in a resource-efficient manner, repairable, and durable.

The takeaway: eBay is far more than a platform for resale. With its global reach, data-driven marketing, and strong infrastructure, eBay offers brands a wide range of opportunities for strategic growth and sustainable success.



Online Course for Nursing Professionals from Kenya in Cooperation with the African German Health Association e.V.

A group of fifth-semester students from the International School of Management (ISM) Hamburg conducted an extensive research project on behalf of the African German Health Association e.V. (AGHA), together with lecturer Johannes Bockmann. The aim of the project was to examine the cultural differences between Kenya and Germany and, based on these findings, to develop an online preparatory course for Kenyan nursing professionals who will be working in Germany in the future.

Following a desk study and semi-structured interviews, a course featuring digital learning content and videos was created with the support of artificial intelligence (AI). The course includes digital modules and video material tailored to the

challenges and cultural differences that arise in the everyday work of nursing staff. Throughout the project, academic and organizational requirements were also taken into account—for example, through the use of project management tools such as Gantt charts and digital planning solutions.

The final project outcome was presented to the AGHA board during a comprehensive closing presentation at ISM Hamburg in November 2025. Since then, the online course has been available free of charge to nursing professionals from Kenya and is already being actively used to support cultural onboarding in Germany and to promote intercultural collaboration in the healthcare sector.

Happiness with or without Sustainability

Glück: what a brilliant name for a fruit spread. Accordingly, ISM students were GLÜCKlich ("happy") to take part in a workshop led by Prof. Dr. Nicole Fabisch together with Marketing Director & Sustainability Manager Manuel Rodriguez Eicke and Category Manager Clarisse Estorff.

Using a three-stage research design consisting of desk research, a focus group, and a survey, the students explored whether the younger target group still finds its "happiness" at breakfast—and what role sustainability plays when it comes to choosing jam.



Concept Development for Viva con Agua

As part of a practice-oriented course, students worked with their lecturer Daniela Zimmer to analyze the donor journey for the NGO Viva con Agua and to develop innovative approaches to strengthen reach, engagement, and supporter loyalty. The focus was on social media, newsletter marketing, events, and potential partnerships with sustainable brands such as Globetrotter, ARMEDANGELS, or GreenKayak.

The resulting concepts illustrated how transparency and authenticity can build trust in social initiatives, and how consistent brand storytelling can foster long-term relationships with donors and partners.



Tony's Chocolonely – Making Sustainability Visible (2025)

In collaboration with the Dutch chocolate company Tony's Chocolonely, students worked with their lecturer Daniela Zimmer to develop communication ideas for the refinement of the Spring 2026 campaign. Based on surveys, blind tastings, and brand analyses, they created innovative concepts for packaging, retail, and social media.

The results demonstrated how brand values such as fairness, transparency, and joy can be communicated authentically. Sustainability was not presented as an obligation, but as an integral part of the brand identity—made tangible for a young, values-driven target group.

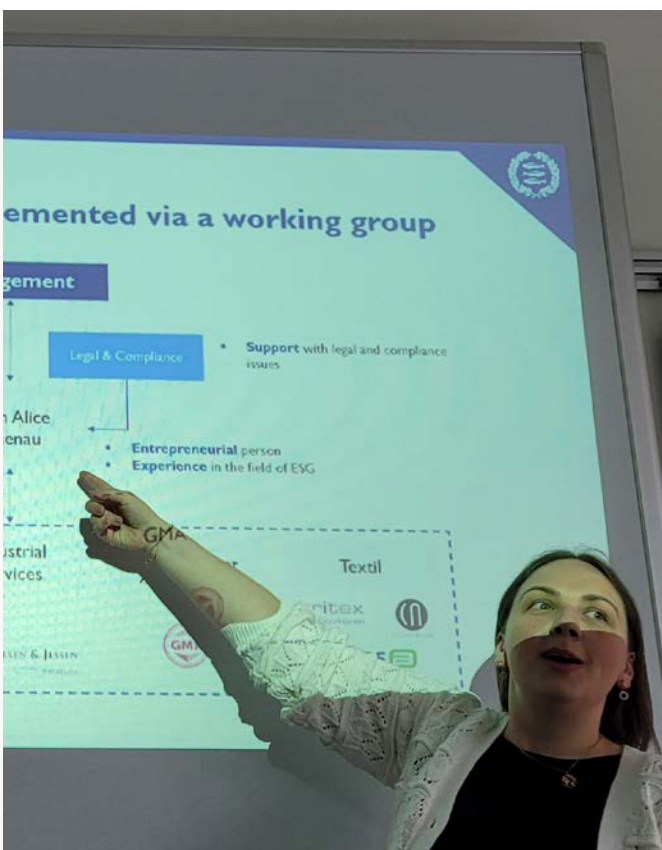


Sustainable Growth – Gustavo Gusto

Gustavo Gusto is currently Europe's fastest-growing food brand. The company sources its raw materials as regionally and sustainably as possible, avoids artificial additives, operates photovoltaic rooftop systems at its production sites, and is socially engaged.

But are these the topics that interest the young generation on TikTok and Instagram—and that influence their purchasing decisions? If not, what are they?

Students explored these questions using qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to present suitable social media concepts to the company.



Guest Lectures

As part of the seminar Corporate Governance & Business Ethics taught by Prof. Dr. Nicole Fabisch, Farah Alice Rosenau, ESG Manager at the Jebens & Jessen Hamburg Group, spoke with international master's students about the importance of responsible corporate governance. For Rosenau, governance is "the most important" of the three sustainability pillars—because only when leadership consistently integrates sustainability into processes and policies can environmental ("E") and social ("S") dimensions be effectively embedded.

Using the European Green Deal as an example, she explained the high level of complexity associated with new reporting obligations, such as those required by the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). Between 800 and 900 data points must be collected—many of them qualitative.

Students from the programs International Logistics & Supply Chain Management, Real Estate Management, and Luxury, Fashion & Sales Management gained practical insights into the complexity of global supply chains and the key success factors of effective ESG management—from stakeholder engagement and training to continuous improvement. As a token of appreciation for her visit, and in line with ISM's Fairtrade Universe spirit, she was presented with a Chilean Fairtrade wine from Süd-Nord-Kontor GEPA Nord.

3.3 Conference Participation and Presentations

Academy of Management (AOM) Annual Meeting, Copenhagen

At the annual meeting of the Academy of Management in July 2025 in Copenhagen, André Reichel (ISM Professor of International Management & Sustainability, Stuttgart Campus) organized the Professional Development Workshop (PDW) “Organising Degrowth for an Equitable World: Creating Well-Being for Our Human & Non-Human Others” and delivered a presentation.

He opened the session by presenting degrowth as a post-capitalist model focused on care, justice, and ecological limits rather than efficiency and optimization. Drawing on his work in the fields of post-growth and regenerative economics, he called for a reconfiguration of ownership, labor, and value creation to enable flourishing beyond traditional growth paradigms.



Green AI Day, Stuttgart

At the GREEN AI DAY event—initiated by the Economic Development Corporation of the City of Stuttgart and the Economic Development Region Stuttgart GmbH to increase the visibility of the regional Green AI ecosystem and its projects—André Reichel, Professor of International Management & Sustainability and Chair of the Supervisory Board of Economic Development Region Stuttgart GmbH, delivered the keynote “Green AI Beyond Bullsh*t” on September 25, 2025.

He emphasized that Green AI only becomes meaningful when it moves beyond the hype—toward truth, transparency, and regeneration within planetary boundaries.

The 5th Symposium on Circular Economy and Sustainability, Chania (Crete), 2024

In the session Food Policy and Sustainability, Prof. Rommel presented the research paper “Sustainable consumer behaviour in the food sector using Germany as an example.” The idea for this study originated in a student workshop at ISM. The aim of the workshop and the subsequent study was to investigate individual consumer behavior in the German organic food market.

Using a choice experiment, product characteristics of selected food and beverage items—such as milk, wine, and vegetables—were presented to a sample of 400 participants in an online survey. The characteristics were defined based on literature and individual consumption experiences, focusing on degree of regionality, packaging type, point of sale, labels, brands, and price (expressed as a percentage mark-up).

The results show significant effects of most characteristics on respondents’ utility functions. Socio-economic variables such as age, gender, household size, and expenditure on organic products strongly influence willingness to pay.

The conference paper was published as SSRN Working Paper 5532599, and a revised version is currently under review at the journal Sustainability.

Additional Presentations

- **Lichtenthaler, U. 2025. Sustainable Procurement as an Opportunity for Innovation in the PUMO World.** Sustainable Procurement Summit, German Association for Supply Chain Management, Procurement and Logistics (BME), Darmstadt, 10 September 2025.
- **Lichtenthaler, U. 2025. The Green Grass Strategy for Overcoming Barriers in Circular Transformation.** Circular Valley Convention, Düsseldorf, 13 March 2025.
- **Linden, M.; Perret, J.K.; Helferich, A.; Rommel, K. (2025). Sustainable Web Design: Digital Marketing Potentials,** SSRN Working Paper 5532599.
- **Spieß, B. 2025. New Key Competencies in Leadership in the Context of Sustainability.** Conference of the German National Association for Student Affairs (Deutsches Studierendenwerk e.V.), University of Rostock, 9 November 2025.
- **Spieß, B. 2025. Rethinking Leadership, Shaping the Future.** Conference of the Genoverband, Q-Club of Deutsche Bank in Berlin, 4 March 2025.
- **Spieß, B. 2024. German and European Companies on the Path to Greater Sustainability.** Conference of the Chinese Delegation at ISM Berlin, 12 September 2024.

3.4 Additional Sustainability-Related Initiatives and Projects at ISM

Sustainable Robo Advisor – ISM Field Project Dortmund

Master's students from the Business Intelligence & Data Science program at ISM Dortmund developed a web application for a sustainable robo advisor together with Prof. Dr. Marcus Becker and in cooperation with INFOMOTION. The solution applies ESG criteria and mean–variance optimization to construct responsible ETF portfolios.

The project strengthened practice-based learning in the field of Sustainable Finance and demonstrated how data analytics, financial mathematics, and sustainable investment strategies intersect.

Data Challenge on Sustainability & Editorial Intelligence

Between January and February 2025, ISM—together with Toolbox Datenkompetenz—organized a Data Challenge titled “Editorial Intelligence” with prize money of up to €800.

The goal was to use text mining and optimization techniques to identify sustainability-related factors that influence the popularity of news articles. The challenge strengthened both data literacy and awareness of resource-efficient information processing.

Promoting Sustainable Data Competence

As part of its commitment to fostering data literacy, The Information Lab Germany offered practical workshops at ISM.

In guest lectures, Raimond Luislampe taught students key competencies in Tableau and Power BI using real datasets. This initiative contributes to building sustainable data competencies in higher education and prepares future decision-makers for data-driven transformation processes.

Podcast “ISM Perspectives on...”

The podcast “ISM Perspectives on...” provides a platform for experts, researchers, and practitioners to discuss current developments in business, society, and higher education. Topics range from digital transformation, innovation, and leadership to sustainable finance, fair trade, and global partnerships.

Sustainability is a recurring theme within a broader dialogue about forward-looking and responsible practices. By sharing diverse perspectives and research insights, the podcast encourages reflection and exchange on how organizations and individuals can contribute to positive transformation. As a digital and freely accessible format, it expands knowledge transfer beyond the classroom and underscores ISM's commitment to openness, inclusion, and lifelong learning.

These projects demonstrate how academic teaching and applied research at ISM help anchor sustainability as a topic of innovation and competence within the digital economy.



3.5 Publications in the Field of Sustainability

- Beyerhaus, C., Hodeck, A. (2025). **Sustainable Luxury Sport Tourism. An Empirical Investigation.** In Hodeck, A., van Rheenen, D., Sobry, C. (Eds.), Sport Tourism Development. Local to Global Perspectives (p. 169). UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

- Fabisch, N., Schmidpeter, R., Schuster, G., Sihl-Weber, A. (Eds.) (2025). **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. Global Goals for Sustainable Development.** Springer Gabler, Berlin, Heidelberg. ISBN/EAN: 978-3-662-70472-1, 978-3-662-68327-9 (17 September 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-68327-9>. Print edition: 875 pages, 3662704722.



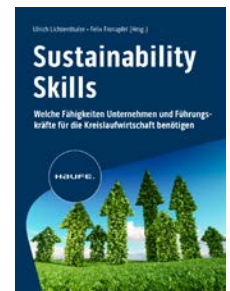
The Springer Major Reference Work “SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth,” for which Prof. Dr. Nicole Fabisch served as Chief & Corresponding Editor, comprises contributions from 109 authors from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. SDG 8 is central to the transformation toward a sustainable global economy and is closely linked to poverty reduction, education, gender equality, and the mitigation of social inequalities. At the same time, implementation efforts face pressure from global crises such as climate change, the aftermath of pandemics, geopolitical disruptions, and fragile supply chains.

The volume adopts a transdisciplinary approach to explore how decent working conditions, social participation, and sustainable economic growth can be aligned. It covers all sub-goals of SDG 8 — from productive growth to combating forced labor.

- Fabisch, N., Schmidpeter, R., Schuster, G., Sihl-Weber, A. (Eds.) (2025). **Overview of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with special consideration of SDG 8.** In: Fabisch, N., Schmidpeter, R., Schuster, G., Sihl-Weber, A. (eds) SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. Global Goals for Sustainable Development. Springer Gabler, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-68327-9_78-1
- Fabisch, N. (2025). **The Role of Banks in Achieving SDG 8.** In: Fabisch, N., Schmidpeter, R., Schuster, G., Sihl-Weber, A. (eds) SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. Global Goals for Sustainable Development. Springer Gabler, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-68327-9_75-1
- Fabisch, N. (2024). **The Relevance of Sustainability Certifications for Banks.** In: Bruhn, M., Hadwich, K. (eds) Sustainable Service Management. Forum Dienstleistungsmanagement. Springer Gabler, Wiesbaden, pp. 609–660. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-45146-2_22
- Horning, J. M.; Perret, J. K. (2025). **A Profit with a Purpose: How Profit Orientation Shapes Organizational Support and Perceived Product Quality of Social Ventures,** Asian Journal of Economics and Business, accepted.

- Komeyer, M.; Perret, J. K.; Skretkowicz, Y.; Rommel, K. (2025). **ESG Reporting and Consumer Product Choice – Evaluating Corporate Sustainability Branding in Fast Moving Consumer Goods,** International Journal of Applied Research in Management and Economics 8 (2), 11–28. <https://doi.org/10.33422/ijarme.v8i2.1502>
- Lichtenthaler, U., & Fronapfel, F. (Eds.) (2024). **Sustainability Skills: Welche Fähigkeiten Unternehmen und Führungskräfte für die Kreislaufwirtschaft benötigen.** Freiburg: Haufe.

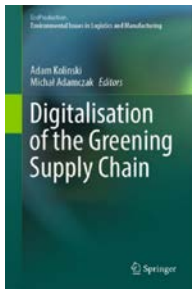
The book is part of a research project by Prof. Dr. Ulrich Lichtenthaler that examines sustainability as a foundation for competitiveness and innovation. The volume, co-edited with Felix Fronapfel, highlights the competencies companies and employees need to remain successful in an increasingly sustainability-oriented and circular-economy-driven business environment. Although many companies have already launched sustainability initiatives, the development of the necessary skills is still in its early stages.



The book provides insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with building sustainability competencies, shedding light on essential future skills, transformation processes, and the role of leadership—both within individual companies and within broader industry contexts, ecosystems, and regulatory frameworks. A particular focus is placed on the growing importance of the circular economy, complemented by contributions from prominent business leaders and experts.

- Lichtenthaler, U. (2025). **Responsive and proactive sustainability orientation: A strategy and innovation typology for the ESG era.** International Journal of Innovation and Technology Management, 22(2): 1–17.
- Lichtenthaler, U. (2025). **Auf Wachstumskurs: Die Green Grass Strategy – Welche Chancen bietet die PUMO Welt der Kreislaufwirtschaft.** Neue Verpackung – Grüne Industrie, online, 18 July 2025.
- Lichtenthaler, U. (2025). **ESG unter Druck in der PUMO-Welt.** Haufe Sustainability, online, 15 April 2025.
- Lichtenthaler, U. (2024). **Opportunities through increased sustainability: How sustainability management will evolve in the future.** Zeitschrift Führung + Organisation, 93(6): 340–345.

- Pang, X., Tomanek, D. P. (2025). **Impact of Digitalization on Ecological Sustainability in Warehousing—Case Study of JD.com and SF Express Warehouses in Shanghai.** In: Kolinski, A., Adamczak, M. (eds) *Digitalisation of the Greening Supply Chain.* EcoProduction. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-88918-9_7



Sustainability is becoming increasingly important in logistics. Xixin Pang, ISM alumnus, and Prof. Dr. Dagmar Tomanek examined the relationship between digitalization and ecological sustainability in warehouse logistics. The study compared two leading Chinese logistics companies operating in the megacity of Shanghai. JD.com manages “Asia No. 1,” one of Asia’s most advanced automated warehouses, while SF Express relies largely on manual processes.

The analysis shows that JD.com achieves five times higher digital efficiency, but “only” twice the CO₂ savings compared to SF Express. The study, published by Springer, contributes to international research in the field of sustainable logistics.

- Perey, R., & Reichel, A. (2025). **Corporate Sustainability from a Degrowth Perspective.** In T. Clarke, S. Benn, & M. Edwards (Eds.), *Routledge Companion to Corporate Sustainability* (pp. tbd.). London: Routledge.
- Perret, J.K., Beyerhaus, C., Ding, S. (2025). **Navigating the High Jewelry Industry’s Future: Sustainability and Brand Diversification.** *Businesses*, 5(4), 49. <https://doi.org/10.3390/businesses5040049>
- Perret, J.K.; Gómez Velázquez, A.; Mehn, A. (2025). **Green Cosmetics—The Effects of Package Design on Consumers’ Willingness-to-Pay and Sustainability Perceptions.** *Sustainability*, 17(6), 2581. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17062581>

- Stonke, J.; Perret, J.K.; Mehn, A. (2025). **Pre-Ordering in the Fashion Industry – Consumer Preference of the Sustainability Strategy.** *SSRN Working Paper* 5740742.
- Reichel, A. (2025). **Entrepreneurial Sufficiency: Strategies and Challenges for Companies from a Post-Growth Perspective.** *Zeitschrift für Wirtschafts- und Unternehmensethik*, 26(2), 156–173. <https://doi.org/10.5771/1439-880x-2025-2-156>
- Reichel, A. (2024a). **Making Space Visible Again.** In *The Future: Project AG* (Ed.), *Raum: Räume transformieren, Zukunft gestalten* (1st ed., pp. 38–41). The Future: Project AG.
- Reichel, A. (2024b). **Post-(Growth-)2030 Agenda: A Post-Growth Critique of the UN SDGs.** In N. Fabisch, R. Schmidpeter, G. Schuster, & A. Sihn-Weber (Eds.), *SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth* (pp. 1–9). Springer Berlin Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-68327-9_3-1
- Kropfeld, M. I., & Reichel, A. (2024). **The Future of Organizations: Understanding Business Model Implications of Shifting from Profit to Purpose.** In M. Gossen & L. Niessen (Eds.), *Sufficiency in Business: The Transformative Potential of Business for Sustainability* (pp. 65–82). transcript. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839469101>
- Sandmaier, C. M., Schmid, P., & Widenhorn, A. (2025). **Meta-Analysis of Consensus About Transition Scenarios with Respect to Hydrogen as a Replacement for Crude Oil.** *The International Journal of Sustainability Policy and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2325-1166/CGP/v21i02/71-105>
- Spieß, B., Davydychik, M. (2025). **Sustainable Transformation as a Catalyst for New Key Competencies in Leadership and Innovative Learning Cultures.** In Fabisch et al. (Eds.), *SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth.* Springer Nature. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-662-68327-9
- Spieß, B., Ürz, G. (2025). **Sustainable Construction and Affordable Housing – How GROPYUS Uses Digital Tools and “Deep Sustainability” to Develop Buildings as Products.** In Just et al. (Eds.), *Innovative Sustainability or Sustainable Innovation: Interactions Between Digitalization, Technologies, and Sustainable Business Practices.* Springer Nature. ISBN 978-3-662-68995-0

3.6 Selection of Theses

The continuous expansion of sustainability-related content is also reflected in a growing number of final theses that focus on core sustainability topics. The range of themes illustrates the increasing interest of students in areas such as diversity, inclusion, and responsible managerial behavior.

Bachelor Theses (Selection)

- Analysis and concept design of sustainability communication in the food industry using the example of Lebensbaum (Ulrich Walter GmbH)
- Use of Artificial Intelligence to Reduce the CO₂ Footprint in Supply Chain Management of Manufacturing Companies
- Ethical Integrity and Transparency in Supply Chains in the Fashion Industry
- Greenwashing – Marketing Trick or Genuine Sustainability?
- How the Sustainability Megatrend Influences B2B Communication of Plastic Manufacturers
- Circular Economy in the Construction Industry: Empirical Analysis of Drivers and Barriers in Light of Current Developments
- Social Responsibility in the Context of Sustainable Transformation

Master Theses (Selection)

- Analysis of the effects of the Second Leadership Positions Act on women's career opportunities, with special consideration of Deutsche Post AG
- Basic Principles for the Development of a Sustainability Strategy
- Development of a model for evaluating ESG criteria in real estate investments based on a mixed-methods analysis
- How has the discourse around sustainability in corporate reporting in the technology, media and telecom industry evolved over the past decade?
- How Leadership Structures and Traditional Family Values Shape Sustainability Reporting in Large Family Businesses
- Integrating Normative Ethics into Sustainable Business Models
- Modelling the relationship between ESG criteria and selected financial ratios – a qualitative study

- Sustainability as a Purchase Criterion for Luxury Brands: The Tension Between Classic Brand Values and Sustainability in the Luxury Goods Industry
- Sustainability in E-Commerce: Examination of Sustainability Aspects in Brick-and-Mortar Retail
- Sustainability in Fashion Production: Key Challenges and Recommendations
- Sustainability Strategies in the Automotive Industry: The Role of Green Steel in the Transition to Low-Emission Vehicle Production
- Navigating the High Jewelry Industry's Future: Supply Chain Sustainability, Brand Strategies and Diversification
- New Work and Sustainability: Analysis of Alternative Work Models from an Ecological Perspective and Their Contribution to Climate Protection
- Potentials and Influencing Factors of the Shared Economy to Reduce E-Waste Examined Through the Lens of Generation Z
- Sustainability in Large-Scale Sporting Events: A Participant-Centric Approach
- Sustainability Reporting in Professional Football – An AI-Based Analysis of Borussia Dortmund's Sustainability Reports Using Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)
- Sustainable Investments in the Context of Regulatory Requirements
- Sustainable Fashion: A Comparative Study of Luxury and Mass Market Brands and Chinese Consumers' Perspectives
- The Impact of Sustainability Criteria on Banks' Internal Lending Decisions in Real Estate Financing: A German Market Perspective
- Effects of Social Sustainability Criteria on Real Estate Marketing – A Qualitative Analysis of Drivers and Barriers

ISM Alumni Interview

Questions on Sustainability:

Friederike Claus

What originally motivated you to become interested in sustainability topics?

Sustainability concerns all of us. People often find it difficult to change their behavior—especially when something is forbidden or taken away from them. A good example is nutrition: vegetarian or vegan products show that change is possible when attractive alternatives are created that do not require sacrifice but offer the same quality of life as a non-sustainable lifestyle.

To promote and expand sustainability in the long term, we therefore need solutions that are suitable for everyday life and provide a positive experience. We all share responsibility for ensuring that our planet remains livable in the future.

In a world confronted daily with challenges such as wars, famine, and threats to democracy, it is easy to feel small and powerless as an individual. In a private context, it sometimes seems as though one can achieve very little. But within a company that is actively and holistically committed to sustainability, you gain the feeling of being part of a larger movement—of truly being able to make a difference.

What does sustainability mean to you personally?

For me, sustainability is a positive feeling of responsibility and participation. It means making conscious decisions that benefit not only myself but also future generations. When you feel that your actions—whether in everyday life or in a company—are part of a larger movement, it creates a sense of purpose and hope.

Sustainability is not about sacrifice; it is an opportunity to improve things and find ways to bring the environment, society, and the economy into harmony. It represents progress, awareness, and the belief that change is possible when we act together.

Was there a moment or project that particularly shaped your perspective on sustainability?

A moment that strongly shaped my view on sustainability was learning about and following the work of Project Mako e.V. (project-mako.com), founded by one of my closest friends. The project focuses on regenerative architecture in West Africa, especially in Senegal.

What moved me most:

- The idea of not only thinking about environmental protection in the classical sense (less waste, less energy) but actively building something new. Creating architecture and living spaces that regenerate, work in harmony with nature, and strengthen local communities.
- That my friend and his partners did not approach the project from the outside or impose solutions on people, but developed new paths together with local communities. It showed me: sustainability can mean showing “Here is what the future can look like,” instead of simply saying “You cannot continue like this.”
- At a time when I sometimes felt powerless in the face of global problems—wars, famine, climate change—the project became a tangible example of how one can take action locally with heart and intellect.
- It also made clear: sustainability is about creating opportunities, not restrictions—building spaces that have a future, strengthening communities, connecting architecture, environment, and people.

Through Project Mako, I realized that my own engagement—whether privately or professionally—should not only be symbolic but real and practical. Companies can provide the framework to help shape such projects, become part of a larger movement, and experience this positive sense of responsibility and contribution.

How did your studies at ISM prepare you for sustainability issues in your career?

My Psychology and Management studies at the International School of Management (ISM) prepared me for sustainability topics in several ways.



Friederike Claus

ISM Class of 2025, Psychology and Management
Today: Managing Director, Cargo Cycle,
Team Leader Outbound Handling at DACHSER SE

The interdisciplinary approach—combining psychology, business, and management—showed me how closely sustainable thinking is linked to human behavior and organizational structures.

I learned that sustainable change in companies does not arise through strategies or guidelines alone, but through understanding motivation, mindset, and behavioral patterns of employees. The psychological perspective is essential when embedding sustainable values credibly and long-term.

The international orientation of ISM further broadened my perspective: sustainability is not an isolated issue but a global responsibility interpreted differently across cultures. Through projects, case studies, and discussions, we learned to consider business decisions not only economically, but also ethically and socially.

Overall, ISM helped me understand that sustainability is not only ecological, but also psychological and social—and that responsible management always begins with people.

How does sustainability influence your professional work today?

Sustainability plays a central role in both of my roles—at Cargo Cycle and at DACHSER—though in different ways.

At Cargo Cycle, sustainability is at the core of the entire business model. The company relies on emissions-free cargo-bike logistics and demonstrates that urban transportation can work without CO₂ emissions, noise, or congestion. Here, I see how ecological responsibility and economic efficiency can go hand in hand.

At DACHSER, I experience how a global logistics company approaches sustainability strategically and comprehensively—from optimizing supply chains to testing alternative drive systems and developing innovative last-mile distribution concepts. The interplay between global structures and local sustainable solutions, such as those offered by Cargo Cycle, shows me how essential cooperation and shared learning are for sustainable logistics.

For me personally, this means that I contribute every day—through efficient processes, conscious decisions, and the promotion of projects that create ecological, social, and economic value.

What opportunities and challenges do you currently see in your industry regarding sustainability?

There are major opportunities and challenges. A positive example is the Zukunftsentscheid Hamburg, which encourages people to adopt sustainable behaviors more quickly. Such initiatives raise awareness and improve acceptance.

However, there are challenges, such as international competition—especially from China and Asia—where sustainable, high-quality, and affordable everyday products are already widely used. Within the industry, there is still resistance to the sustainability movement, and political frameworks are not always supportive.

Still, I believe companies and industries that embrace sustainability early will ultimately benefit. Globally, the market for unsustainable products is shrinking. Competitiveness is increasingly tied to sustainable innovation. Sustainability also creates jobs, secures future consumers, and requires not only ecological actions but well-designed, sustainable processes.

Can you name an example of a change you initiated in your company or environment?

One example is the development of the Cool-Liner at Cargo Cycle—the largest cargo bike with active cooling. This innovation allows us to deliver refrigerated goods sustainably to customers. It demonstrates that sustainable logistics does not have to fail because of technical limitations; innovation and collaboration can create new possibilities.

At DACHSER, I actively advocate for digitalization—promoting paperless processes and more efficient, resource-saving workflows. To me, sustainability also means designing processes that are transparent, digital, and future-proof.

Which competencies does a “Sustainability Professional” need to be successful?

A successful sustainability professional needs openness to new ideas and the ability to think beyond their own discipline. Sustainability is cross-functional—it affects economy, environment, society, and consumption.

Key competencies include:

- Long-term thinking: sustainable decisions show effects over time.
- System understanding: how business actions affect ecological and social systems.
- Reconciling consumption and ecological thinking: integrating sustainability into daily life and business without framing it as a sacrifice.

What advice do you have for ISM students who want to work in sustainability?

Be open to new ideas and think holistically. Sustainability is not just environmental protection—it connects economy, psychology, society, and technology. To make an impact, you need to understand interdependencies and consider different perspectives.

Don't wait for perfection—start now. Every small action counts. Projects like Project Mako or the Cool-Liner show that sustainable progress stems from creativity, cooperation, and the courage to rethink.

Most importantly: see sustainability as an opportunity, not a restriction. When you view it as a positive movement, you can shape the future and find real fulfillment in your career.

Where do you see the biggest levers for sustainable change in the next five to ten years?

I see three main levers: technology, awareness, and cooperation.

1. Technology—digitalization, renewable energy, and mobility innovation will drive sustainable progress.
2. Awareness shift—sustainability must become a natural part of daily life.
3. Cooperation—between companies, politics, academia, and civil society. Sustainability gains impact when it is pursued collectively.

In the long run, companies that integrate sustainability early will benefit the most—ecologically and economically. It's an investment in future viability and in the positive feeling of contributing to real change.

4 Dialogue & Transfer

ISM strengthens its role as a driver of sustainable transformation through targeted research, practice-oriented cooperation, and innovative transfer formats.

Key future-oriented topics such as Green AI, sustainable business models, and organizational resilience play a critical role in shaping a responsible economy. By expanding strategic partnerships with companies, policymakers, and institutions, ISM promotes applied sustainability research and creates space for knowledge exchange and implementation.

This includes active participation in numerous events hosted by partner institutions from industry, academia, and civil society. For example, the

Institute for Sustainable Transformation@ISM regularly takes part in the ZEIT Wissen Congress and the annual conferences of Stiftung KlimaWirtschaft.

A major milestone is the establishment of the Innoclub Dortmund in January 2025—an accelerator jointly operated with the Chamber of Commerce (IHK) and Dortmund Economic Development, supporting sustainable start-ups focusing on sustainable supply chains. With such initiatives, ISM positions itself consistently as a leading competence center for sustainability transformation. In addition, ISM co-hosted the 1st Fairtrade Summit with the Marketing Club Hamburg—a highly successful event.

4.1 Institute for Sustainable Transformation@ISM

The Institute for Sustainable Transformation@ISM, led by Prof. Dr. Brigitte Spieß, has served since its founding in 2022 as a transfer platform connecting science, business, and society. Together with professionals and executives, the institute develops practice-oriented solutions for sustainable and credible business models and supports particularly small and medium-sized enterprises in their transformation processes.

The institute's objective is to:

- make innovative approaches to sustainable business visible in research, teaching, and continuing education,
- initiate and scientifically support model projects, and
- provide key impulses to ISM, its academic programs, and society.

Purpose

The institute aims to highlight innovative spaces of possibility for the sustainable transformation process through its research, teaching, and continuing education programs.

This involves a renewed perspective on the scope of corporate responsibility for the benefit of all stakeholders and encompasses the entire value chain.

The institute's tasks include both transdisciplinary, application-oriented research on sustainability management and the initiation and support of model projects that inspire confidence and offer new, practice-relevant solutions.

The sustainable transformation process presupposes an ethical foundation, a new systemic perspective on the comprehensive transformation of economic activity, and an understanding of transdisciplinary interconnections.

Positioning

The institute operates at the intersection of business, politics, ecology, and society, with a focus on global, sustainable transformation processes in both the private and public sectors.

On the path toward social and sustainable business models, we work with specialists and executives to explore innovative approaches and tools for the credible establishment, implementation, and evaluation of sustainability goals and strategies.

Our aim is to empower companies—especially small and medium-sized enterprises—to effectively navigate the opportunities and risks of the transformation process and comply with legal standards.

With its range of services, the institute is dedicated to enabling people and organizations to help themselves.

Since July 2024, the Institute has been conducting a quantitative and qualitative study on sustainable competence profiles in medium-sized companies together with econsense and better earth.

The study is based on the econsense "Sustainability Competence Programme," in which around 40 SMEs are participating. Executives, sustainability officers and key functional departments were surveyed.

The quantitative study (14 August–10 September 2024) examined, among other aspects:

- which corporate functions are involved in CSRD reporting and sustainability strategy,
- what new requirements arise from this, and
- which additional competencies need to be developed.

The project is being scientifically supported and evaluated by the ISM Institute and better earth.

In 2024–2025, further cooperation projects with the Haufe Academy on sustainable leadership were implemented, along with workshops and presentations (e.g., "German and European Companies on the Path to Greater Sustainability," "Sustainable Transformation and Leadership in Transition").

1. Academic Partnerships

- National and international universities (e.g., TU, FU, LUMSA University, ESMT, Leuphana University)
- Institutes (e.g., IÖW, Borderstep, econsense, On Purpose, GÖW, GLZ, foundations in the field of sustainability, political parties, and working groups)
- Associations, initiatives, and networks

2. (Multidisciplinary) Practice Partners

- Supporters of the institute (sponsors, foundations, companies, political actors, etc.)
- Cooperation partners, platforms, and multipliers (institutes, associations, networks, political organizations, etc.)
- Companies from the SME sector, startups, and large corporations

3. Internal ISM Partnerships

- Cross-campus sustainability project groups (e.g., faculty, students)
- ISM alumni and sustainability experts
- Advisory board (selected stakeholders for collaboration)

4. Media Partnerships

- Media organizations with a focus on sustainability (e.g., ZEIT/Green, dfv, Haufe)
- Ongoing relations with sustainability journalists
- Participation in conferences, congresses, symposia, and similar events



4.2 Conferences & Cooperations

1st Fairtrade Summit at ISM Hamburg in cooperation with the Marketing Club Hamburg

“Social responsibility is like smoking!” — with this bold statement, Florian Körner, Head of Partnership at Lemonaid & ChariTea e.V., opened the 1st Fairtrade Summit, initiated, organized, and moderated by Prof. Dr. Nicole Fabisch in cooperation with the Marketing Club Hamburg on November 6, 2025 at ISM Hamburg. His point was not that one should stop, but rather that one should finally start—instead of remaining stuck in the mindset of “I really should...”

There was certainly no lack of commitment in the room. All four invited speakers were true pioneers in responsible business practices and could hardly be accused of not doing enough.

Eske Tammen, Brand Lead for Tony’s Chocolonely in Germany and Austria, embodies the company’s motto: “crazy about chocolate and serious about people.” In a video message, the roughly 80 guests learned that conditions on cocoa plantations are far from fair. While a handful of multinational corporations dominate the chocolate industry and earn billions, millions of cocoa farmers do not receive a living income, forcing their children to work illegally on cocoa farms to support their families. Tony’s Chocolonely pays an additional premium on top of the Fairtrade price—high enough to bring farmers significantly closer to earning a living wage.

Lemonaid is also a pioneer in the beverage sector and has supported 124 NGOs since 2009. For every bottle of Lemonaid or ChariTea sold, a fixed amount goes to Lemonaid & ChariTea e.V., enabling the organization to distribute more than €10 million in funding to date.

A concept that major beverage corporations such as Pepsi, Coca-Cola, or Red Bull might consider adopting—along with reducing sugar content and artificial flavorings.



Steffen Otten, co-founder of Runamics, is another frontrunner. The Hamburg-based startup develops premium athletic apparel for runners made exclusively from sustainable, biodegradable, or circular materials. One highlight is a Merino sports shirt that doesn’t smell even after exercise.

Last but not least, Sascha Steinbrück, Head of Merchandising at HSV Fußball AG & Co. KGaA, emphasized: “Sustainability in merchandising is the new normal.” If fan shops were ranked by their use of organic cotton and Fairtrade-certified products, HSV—along with FC St. Pauli and Werder Bremen—would be German champions, and FC Bayern would be fighting relegation.

Interestingly, all speakers noted that they are not particularly vocal about their sustainability initiatives. The motto seems to be action over moralizing. But others could—and should—be doing far more: above all, policymakers regarding fair procurement, large corporations, and even the German Football Association (DFB). When it comes to organic or Fairtrade labels, the current situation is still rather bleak.

Speakers (from left): Sascha Steinbrück, moderator and organizer Nicole Fabisch, Steffen Otten, Florian Körner, and ISM campus director Gerrit Lietz



In addition to keynote lectures, podcasts, live interviews and partnerships, the Institute has launched the following two cooperation and training initiatives in 2025:

Foundation Development and Climate Alliance

As the first joint project with the cooperation partner Foundation Development

**FOUNDATION
Development
and Climate
Alliance**



and Climate Alliance an online event series titled “Sustainable Strategies – Developing, Implementing, Communicating” was conceptualized and carried out. Three events, jointly

certified by ISM and the Foundation, were designed specifically for medium-sized companies and SMEs. They combine keynote inputs with interactive learning formats (e.g., Knowledge Café) and practical training elements (e.g., improvisational and business theatre by Steife Brise from Hamburg).

The selected themes of the series focus on the following core topics:

1. Anchoring sustainability strategically (25 September 2025)
2. Communicating sustainability internally and externally (9 October 2025)
3. Leading and managing sustainable transformation processes (4 November 2025)

The three-hour sessions have so far received very positive feedback from executives and supporters of the Foundation.

Additional individually bookable coaching services for SMEs are already being planned with the Foundation’s own academy for later this year.

Podcast: Grad° Global

As part of ISM’s institutional engagement with the Stiftung Allianz für Entwicklung und Klima, Vice President Bakr Fadl was invited as an expert guest on the Foundation’s podcast “Grad° Global.”

The episode explored key issues related to global responsibility, climate protection, and sustainable development. The podcast follows the principle of “thinking globally and acting globally,” aiming to advance CO₂ avoidance, reduction, and international climate finance.

This contribution marks another milestone in ISM’s sustainability process: ISM provides expert insights to an influential forum, expands its network across diverse stakeholder groups, and helps raise awareness for the structural challenges of global climate protection. By participating in this dialogue, ISM not only strengthens its position as a sustainable actor within the SME sector but also underscores the essential interdependence of development and climate—an approach to which ISM is committed both as a university and as a medium-sized enterprise.

ISM’s involvement demonstrates that a sustainability strategy must be lived externally as well as internally—and that genuine transformation can only succeed through cooperation with partners such as the Foundation, dedicated professionals, and companies willing to jointly take responsibility.

Verification of Sustainability Reports According to GRI Standards

In addition to curricular and extracurricular teaching and workshop formats, ISM has also developed practical services for companies through expert assessment activities. Several ISM professors conducted systematic reviews of sustainability reports from selected medium-sized enterprises, based on the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards.

The aim of these reviews was to strengthen transparency, comparability, and the overall quality of reporting.

The analyses evaluated content, metrics, and processes in accordance with GRI requirements and compared them with international best practices. Based on these findings, ISM and its assessors developed concrete, practice-oriented recommendations to support companies in further developing their sustainability strategies. Particular attention was given to: the structured identification of material sustainability topics, the consistency of data, and the traceability of goals and measures.

Upon completion, companies received an expert report with recommendations for improving their next reporting cycle, along with a certificate issued by the ISM Academy.

Through this structured GRI-based evaluation, ISM contributes to credible, transparent, and forward-looking sustainability reporting in the SME sector.



4.3 Supporting Entrepreneurial Initiatives

Promoting Female Entrepreneurship

The EmpowerHER project is funded by the EXIST Women Program and aims to support 10 aspiring female entrepreneurs each year in developing their strengths and advancing their entrepreneurial activities. After its launch in 2024, the project began its second cohort in January 2025. It strengthens diversity and long-term sustainability in entrepreneurship by increasing the number of female founders and fostering inclusive innovation.

By implementing gender-sensitive communication, promoting female role models, and offering regular networking opportunities, the project ensures equitable access to entrepreneurial resources. Cross-institutional collaboration expands networks, facilitates knowledge exchange, and enhances resilience across ecosystems.

Targeted events and the ISM Startup & Innovation Day increase visibility and empower women to develop sustainable business ideas. Continuous evaluation ensures the effectiveness of all measures and contributes to a more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable entrepreneurial landscape.

Establishment of the Start-up Accelerator “innoclub” in January 2025

The Innoclub Dortmund was founded in January 2025 at the TechnologieZentrum Dortmund (TZDO). The initiative was launched by Wirtschaftsförderung Dortmund, the Chamber of Commerce (IHK), TU Dortmund, FH Dortmund and ISM. As an accelerator, Innoclub supports established start-ups in scaling and gaining market traction.

An innovative investment model was developed that enables companies to invest selectively in individual start-ups. Currently, twelve corporate members are involved. Funding is awarded through pitch rounds, and premium members participate directly in the selection of new fellows.

The Innoclub awards one-year fellowships valued at €10,000 to seven start-ups. These fellowships include consulting, office space, trade fair participation, mentoring, and event access. Participating companies benefit from exclusive networks, exposure to technological trends and increased visibility.

With more than 300 m², the clubhouse at TZDO provides modern workspaces, meeting rooms and event facilities. Overall, the Innoclub strengthens the innovation ecosystem in the Ruhr region by connecting SMEs, corporates, and start-ups, and by fostering sustainable innovation.



In summary, the Innoclub is an exclusive network dedicated to strengthening innovative capacity in Dortmund and the Westphalian Ruhr region. It brings together SMEs, corporates, and start-ups to share experiences, knowledge, and resources — and to jointly advance sustainable innovation.

More information: innoclub.net

Institutionalized roles ensure the continuity of these initiatives. Through ongoing funding programs—particularly those supporting women—the project embeds sustainability, inclusivity, and an entrepreneurial mindset both within the university and beyond.

ISM Startup Competition

The ISM Startup Competition is an annual contest for ISM students, alumni, and staff. Its goal is to support early-stage ideas by providing visibility and opportunities for participants to present their concepts. A jury consisting of internal and external members selects four winners.

Now in its seventh year, the competition has produced numerous winners with strong ecological or social sustainability orientations. Overall, ISM actively seeks to promote and support sustainable startup ideas.



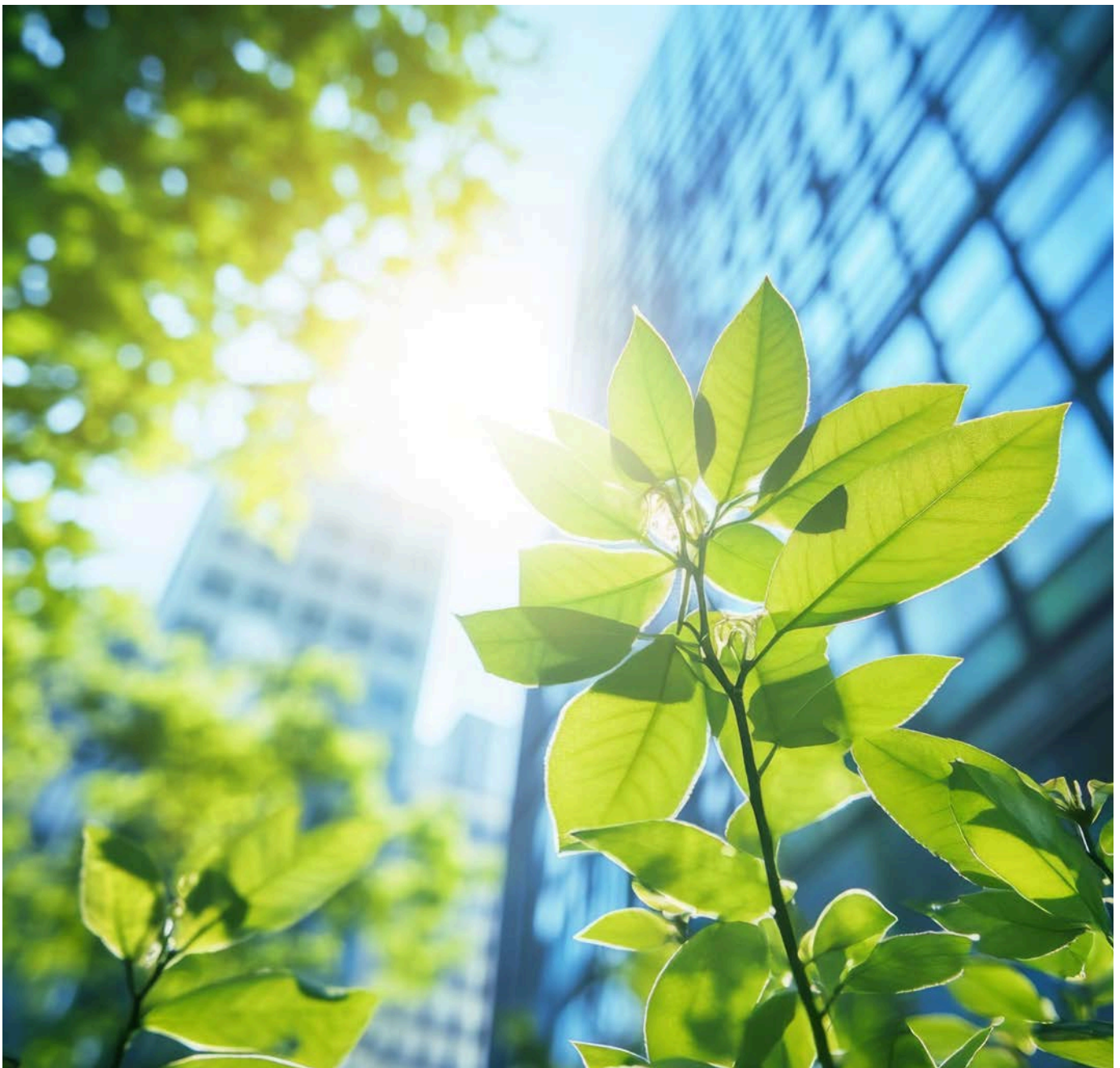
4.4 Additional Sustainability Activities at University Institutes

Brand & Retail Management Institute (BRMI)

BRMI focuses its research activities on sustainability and digitalization, examining their impact on retail, brand management, marketing, communication, and consumer behavior. Both corporate and stakeholder perspectives are considered.

Real Estate Research Institute (REL @ ISM)

The REL places a strong emphasis on sustainable real estate management. Master's theses and research projects continuously explore topics such as heritage conservation and sustainability, sustainable real estate investments, impacts on financial metrics and valuation, and approaches within real estate marketing.



ISM Alumni Interview

Questions on Sustainability:

Josephine Rosemeier

What originally motivated you to become interested in sustainability topics?

In 2019, during my practice-integrated bachelor's degree in Business Administration, I first began to engage intensively with the topic of sustainability. At that time, I asked myself how I could create real added value in my future professional life. The discussions surrounding Fridays for Future made me aware of how relevant sustainability is in a corporate context as well. I wrote my first term paper on sustainability controlling – and that's when I realized that sustainability touches almost all areas of a company. Since then, the topic has fascinated me, and I decided to make it my professional focus and calling.

What does sustainability mean to you personally?

For me, sustainability means taking responsibility for our society and for future generations. It is about making decisions in a way that brings ecological, social, and economic aspects into balance. Personally, it means acting consciously – both in everyday life and at work – and keeping not only short-term successes, but also long-term consequences in mind.

Was there a moment or project that particularly shaped your perspective on sustainability?

In my current position, I had the opportunity to actively contribute to the group-wide establishment of a sustainability function within an international corporation. Through this process, I learned from the ground up how the initially theoretical topic of sustainability can be transferred into the complex structures of a company and implemented in a practical and meaningful way.

How did your studies at ISM prepare you for sustainability issues in your career?

Because I studied for my master's degree part-time, synergies emerged again and again – I was able to apply what I was learning directly in my daily work and vice versa. Overall, the program helped me significantly to understand sustainability as a holistic concept and to apply this perspective in practice.

How does sustainability influence your professional work today?

In my role as a Project Manager in Group Sustainability, sustainability forms the guiding principle of my work.

“

Sustainability fascinates me because of its complexity – and because it allows me to create real, measurable value through my work.

”

Josephine Rosemeier

ISM Class of 2025, M.A. Sustainability Management (ISM distance learning). Project Manager in the area of Group Sustainability, MERKUR GROUP



What opportunities and challenges do you currently see in your industry with regard to sustainability?

The greatest challenge right now lies in the uncertainty of regulatory frameworks, which causes many companies to hesitate. I view the currently rather cautious stance of the EU regarding sustainability topics critically, as climate change is not negotiable – the scientific evidence is clear.

At the same time, I am convinced that sustainability will remain a central future topic because our actions today fundamentally shape what the world will look like tomorrow.

Can you give an example of where you have initiated concrete change in your company or environment?

One of my biggest successes so far, I believe, is the extensive awareness-building work our department has carried out within the company.

Today, all key functions in our corporate group have a solid understanding of how multifaceted and complex sustainability is – and that credible sustainability is only possible on the basis of traceable, reliable data

Which competencies are essential, in your opinion, to succeed as a “Sustainability Professional”?

Curiosity and openness. Sustainability is a highly complex topic that looks different in every company context. That’s why it takes a great deal of curiosity to understand the various dimensions and continuously explore new interconnections. Openness is equally crucial, as the role requires constant collaboration with all departments.

Only through dialogue and a strong understanding of processes can sustainability be effectively embedded in a company.

What advice would you give to current ISM students who want to work in the field of sustainability?

I recommend exploring different industries and reading as many sustainability reports as possible. This helps develop an understanding of which sustainability issues are material depending on business activities. It also becomes clear how differently the topic is currently reported – and why a legally mandated, unified reporting standard is so important

Where do you see the greatest leverage for sustainable change in the next five to ten years?

I believe the greatest leverage lies in holding companies even more accountable through legislation. They must assume full responsibility for their products and align them consistently with ESG requirements.

If you had to describe sustainability in one word or one sentence – what would it be?

For me, sustainability can be summed up in one word: future security. It’s about acting today so that future generations have the same opportunities and resources that we have.

Where can people learn more about your work (e.g., LinkedIn, website, organization)?

You can learn more about my work on my LinkedIn profile. We also regularly share updates on sustainability projects and initiatives on the MERKUR GROUP’s website (merkur.group). I am happy to connect for professional exchange on sustainability topics.

Contact Details

If you have questions or need help locating information, please contact sustainability@ism.de.

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Imprint

Publisher: International School of Management (ISM)

Edition: Dec. 2025

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