



Sustainability

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Sustainability as a Mission, Not as a Trend!

In an era marked by environmental urgency, social inequality, and rapid technological change, the call for sustainability has never been stronger. It is no longer a concept that belongs to fleeting global agendas or periodic campaigns – it is a moral, scientific, and social imperative. *“Sustainability as a mission, not as a trend!”* encapsulates Universidade Católica Portuguesa’s conviction that a sustainable future must be consciously built through education, research, and civic engagement. This conviction permeates the institution’s identity, echoing both the vision of *Laudato si’* (Pope Francis, 2015) and the transversal approach of the *UCP Agenda for Sustainability* (2021) and the *UCP Strategic Development Plan* (2021–2025). At UCP, sustainability is not a choice – it is a vocation, deeply rooted in its mission to serve the common good.

Sustainability as a Core of the University’s Mission

Founded on Christian Humanism, UCP sees sustainability as integral development, placing the human person at the centre of concern while recognizing the interconnectedness of all life. Sustainability, in this sense, is not limited to ecological preservation; it includes social justice, economic ethics, cultural vitality, and spiritual responsibility. The UCP Agenda for Sustainability articulates this integration clearly, envisioning a university that nurtures “sustainable knowledge and action” across teaching, research, and community life.

UCP’s identity as a Catholic university gives this commitment distinct meaning. Inspired by *Laudato si’*; sustainability is understood as “care for our common home.” Pope Francis’s appeal resonates profoundly with the Catholic intellectual tradition: “The climate is a common good, belonging

to all and meant for all.” This insight reinforces the collective dimension of sustainability, calling academic communities to act as stewards and co-creators of a just and healthy planet. At UCP, this call translates into practical action and academic responsibility, embedding sustainability into its mission of shaping ethical, knowledgeable, and compassionate leaders.

Education for Sustainable Citizenship

Universities and colleges can – and should – be models of sustainable practices such as conserving resources, improving energy efficiency, managing waste responsibly, and adopting circular strategies, so that students begin to view these actions as everyday habits. Broadly, higher education institutions can operate on two fronts: by effectively teaching sustainability concepts to students, who then carry these practices into their homes and social circles; and by directly engaging external audiences through scientific, technological, and cultural outreach and by forming partnerships with local communities and industry (Boiocchi *et al.*, 2025).

Education is UCP’s most powerful instrument for change. Integrating sustainability into the curriculum is not a marginal initiative; it is a deliberate pedagogical choice that reflects the belief that knowledge must serve life. UCP has progressively incorporated the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into courses across all faculties, from economics and management to theology, law, arts, and biotechnology.

Through its *SDG* courses and interdisciplinary programmes, students explore sustainability as an ethical and systemic challenge. They learn not only to analyse environmental data or design sustainable technologies, but to understand the moral and human implications of their decisions. Courses are designed to cultivate critical awareness and transformative action, enabling students to become, in the words of the *Transform4Europe* vision, “entrepreneurs of knowledge.”

Moreover, UCP promotes learning beyond classrooms. Through challenge-based learning, service-learning projects, and entrepreneurial initiatives, students engage directly with local communities, businesses, and NGOs. This experiential approach empowers them to translate theoretical knowledge into real-world impact. The result is a generation of citizens who recognize sustainability not as an abstract goal but as a shared responsibility anchored in solidarity and service.

Research for a Sustainable Future

Research stands as the other pillar of UCP's sustainable mission. The university hosts 15 research centres dedicated to addressing societal and environmental challenges.

These centres foster innovative and collaborative research that bridges science, policy, and community practice. From climate action and biodiversity protection to ethical finance and digital sustainability, UCP researchers work in partnership with public institutions, private organizations, and international consortia to co-create solutions.

Initiatives such as the *InSuRe Hub* (Innovation, Sustainability and Regeneration Hub), create an international ecosystem of transdisciplinary knowledge that promotes business solutions with a circular, sustainable and regenerative scope, powered by disruptive technologies. In addition to its commitment to fundamental research, the University is recognised for the social impact of its research agenda and its contribution to policymaking. By aligning academic inquiry with societal needs, UCP reaffirms that universities are not isolated ivory towers, but living institutions embedded in their contexts. Research is not pursued for academic recognition alone; it is guided by the belief that knowledge must serve transformation. As the *UCP Agenda for Sustainability* expresses, the university's aim is "to generate research that contributes to the well-being of people, the protection of ecosystems, and the advancement of justice."

Sustainability Through Community Engagement

UCP's understanding of sustainability is profoundly relational. Grounded in the *Transform4Europe 2026* theme "*Community. Communities*", the university recognizes that true transformation emerges from collaboration and shared purpose. The university's community engagement strategy bridges academic excellence and social responsibility.

One emblematic example is the *Green Campus Initiative*, which reimagines UCP's campuses as laboratories for sustainable living. Through energy-efficiency programmes, waste-reduction measures, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable mobility, the university models the very values it teaches. But beyond environmental performance, these initiatives nurture participation: students, faculty, and staff collectively design actions, evaluate outcomes, and disseminate best practices. Sustainability becomes a lived experience within the university

community and radiates outward to surrounding regions. The social dimension is in fact central to UCP's sustainability approach, expressed through various initiatives in volunteering, inclusion, well-being, culture, the arts, and community service. These actions demonstrate UCP's role as an agent of change, contributing to a fairer, more inclusive society aligned with the SDGs.

In addition, UCP actively works with local communities through service-learning projects and parish partnerships to address social and environmental needs. Our strong commitment to the Service-Learning (ApS) methodology, which is available across all university campuses, combines academic learning with community service, promoting student reflection on lived experiences. This approach has been used to develop projects that address real community needs, enabling students to apply their theoretical knowledge in practical contexts.

Whether improving urban garden ecosystems, supporting social enterprises, or providing legal and economic advice to vulnerable groups, UCP fosters a culture of solidarity and ecological conversion. The community becomes both the beneficiary and the co-author of change.

Through its role in the *Transform4Europe* Alliance, UCP amplifies this local commitment by engaging in transnational partnerships. Together with European universities, UCP advances the three core vectors of *T4EU* transformation: environmental, digital, and societal, thus positioning sustainability as a shared European mission. This collaborative spirit reflects the conviction that universities, as global communities of knowledge, must act together to shape a sustainable and inclusive future.

Faith, Knowledge, and Transformation

In line with *Laudato si'*, UCP's approach recognizes that sustainability entails a profound conversion, a shift in worldview that integrates science, ethics, and spirituality. Education and innovation alone are insufficient without compassion, humbleness, and an understanding of interdependence. The Catholic intellectual tradition offers a moral compass that prevents sustainability from being reduced to management efficiency or branding.

For UCP, sustainability is about coherence between what the university teaches and how it operates, from governance structures and procurement policies to equality initiatives and interfaith dialogue. In all these dimensions, sustainability becomes a mark of integrity, an

authentic witness to the mission of serving the common good through truth and love.

Conclusion: Mission and Hope

At UCP, sustainability is not a passing trend or an academic accessory, it is the living expression of the university's mission. Across teaching, research, and community engagement, UCP embodies the call to care for creation, promote justice, and foster human flourishing.

By aligning its strategies with the wisdom of *Laudato si'* and the goals of the *UCP Agenda for Sustainability*, the university affirms that the future depends on our capacity to act as one global community, united by respect for life and a spirit of fraternity. As we approach the *Transform4Europe Week 2026*, under the theme "*Community. Communities*", UCP stands as a witness to the fact that sustainability is not merely to be discussed, but to be practiced, lived, and shared.

References

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