ARIES4

Alliance of regional innovation ecosystems based on smart sustainable specialisation strategies
ARIES4

Lifelong learning program for company managers on sustainability - Description

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Outline

1   Introduction

The European project ARIES4 (Alliance of Regional Innovation Ecosystems based on Smart Sustainable Specialisation Strategies) is a collaborative initiative uniting four European regions—Navarra (Spain), Gabrovo (Bulgaria), Värmland (Sweden), and Southern Denmark. Its overarching goal is to establish a robust framework of cooperation and knowledge exchange among key stakeholders in smart specialization strategies. These stakeholders include universities, vocational training providers, public-sector organizations, private businesses, and society at large.

The project's overarching mission is to advance the sustainability transition for companies and organizations. This involves the development of a sustainability course tailored for business managers. This program aims to equip participants with essential knowledge and practical tools, enabling them to incorporate sustainable practices into their organizations and drive their transition to a greener economy.

2   Description of the Professional Training Programme

The following training programme has been developed for integration in life-long learning programmes in academic institutions. The target audience are professionals whose activities require further qualification regarding sustainable management. The programme is constituted of four components, which combine to offer learners the theoretical and practical skills for developing, implementing and analyzing sustainable business practices. It comprises four modules: **Sustainable Markets**: Exploring the dynamics of market transformation toward sustainability. **Sustainable Organizations**: Focusing on integrating sustainability into business strategies and operations. **Sustainable Processes and Approaches**: Covering topics like the circular economy, innovation, and resource efficiency. **Final Report**: Allowing participants to apply their learning to their own, real-world organizational contexts.

COMPONENT 1 - SUSTAINABLE MARKETS (30%)

This component introduces the fundamental principles of sustainable markets and their role in today's global economy. It explores how economic trends and policies are evolving towards more responsible production and consumption patterns, balancing economic growth with environmental and social sustainability. Through this component, participants will understand the challenges and opportunities associated with the transformation of markets towards more sustainable practices, considering factors such as technological innovation, public regulation and collaboration between companies, institutions and civil society. The aim is to equip managers with the necessary tools to successfully lead and manage in a sustainability-oriented market environment.

Course 1.1: The responsible consumer-citizen

The course provides theoretical as well as practical tools and perspectives to help you understand consumer and citizen responsibility. We will explore why and how people engage (or don't engage) with social and environmental issues and responsibilities. Special focus will be given to the social and cultural factors that influence how consumers and citizens take responsibility, the challenges they face, and the impact this has on society and individual well-being. The course addresses the following topics:

- Theoretical Foundations of Consumer and Citizen Responsibility
- Engagement with Social and Environmental Issues
- Social and Cultural Influences
- Challenges in Taking Responsibility
- Impact on Society and Individual Well-being
- Individual skills for the future https://innerdevelopmentgoals.org/
- Sustainable circular economy, due to the EU's waste directive, Sweden and all other member states must have national waste plans and waste prevention programs. In Sweden, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for drawing up the national waste plan and the waste prevention program. That has been updated October 2024. https://www-naturvardsverket-se.translate.goog/om-oss/aktuellt/nyheter-och-pressmeddelanden/2024/november/en-kavalkad-av-atgarder-for-en-hallbar-cirkular-framtid/?_x_tr_sl=sv&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=sv&_x_tr_pto=wapp

Course 1.2: Ethics, sustainability and Global development

The course provides an overview of basic ethical perspectives and introduces key concepts about individual and collective responsibility. Along with a theoretical and case-based introduction to the main issues and challenges in global development (including environmental destruction, resource management, biodiversity concerns and social inequality), this will equip you to understand both the ethical considerations and the complex systems involved in global development, and how these elements interact. Among others, this course will address inequalities between Global North and South, and the effect of this inequality on differential responsibilities for adoption of sustainable practices. The course addresses the following topics:

- Value Theory
- Individual and Collective Responsibility
- The three forms of sustainability
- Global Development Issues and decolonization
- Impact Assessment Tools: we will introduce and critically apply impact assessment tools such as the SDG impact assessment tool, which will among others allow participants to link their companies' activities and areas of competence to the SDGs.

Course 1.3: Organizations & Society

Organizations operate within social environments. To function effectively, they need to adapt to but will also influence these environments. This module gives you the theoretical knowledge to understand and critically analyse an organization's legal, economic, and human interactions with its social environments, with a focus on sustainability. It also covers how organizations are currently responding to social environment demands. Additionally, the module explores local and European regulations promoting sustainable products, such as the Right to Repair Directive. The course will address the following topics:

- Organizations and sustainability
- Responses to Social Environment Demands
- Stakeholder Management

- The local and European regulatory landscape, including international directives (e.g. Antigreenwashing Directive)
- The value of being an attractive employer for the future, with a truly sustainable company will attract talents

COMPONENT 2 - SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATIONS (35%)

This component addresses how organisations can integrate sustainability into their strategy, operations and culture, ensuring a balance between economic performance, social responsibility and environmental management. Through a practical and strategic approach, participants will learn how to develop and implement sustainable policies and practices in key areas such as human resource management, marketing, finance and communication. This component empowers managers to lead the transition towards more responsible organisations, improving their value chain, reputation and competitiveness in increasingly sustainability-oriented markets.

Course 2.1: Sustainable strategy & management

This course enables organizations' transition towards a more sustainable future, balancing economic success with environmental stewardship and social responsibility. The course is divided into two essential parts, each focusing on critical aspects of sustainable strategy and management.

Part 1: Sustainable Strategy and the Value Chain

This section delves into the intricacies of developing a sustainable strategy that encompasses the entire value chain. Participants will learn to:

- Analyze the Value Chain to identify opportunities for holistic sustainable change
- Identify Opportunities for Sustainability in concert with other value-chain actors
- Develop a Holistic Strategy fitting sustainable value-chain change
- Analyze strategies both local and global(international) from both suppliers and customers perspective
- Human rights in the value chain

Part 2: Implementing Sustainable Strategy in Leadership and HRM

Building on the strategic foundation from Part 1, this section focuses on the practical aspects of implementing sustainable strategies through effective leadership and human resource management (HRM). This part addresses the following topics:

- Leadership for Sustainability (Good governance)
- Sustainable HRM Practices (Compliance)
- Change Management
- Diversity and inclusion
- Human rights, decent working conditions, right to collective association

The learning format for this course includes self-evaluation via the ARIES4 self-evaluation tool as basis for coursework, case studies and best practices to explore real-world examples of successful sustainable strategies implemented by leading organizations, and an Individual assignment applying the course learnings to the learner's organization

Course 2.2: Responsible Marketing & communication

This course equips learners with the knowledge and competencies to develop responsible marketing and communication strategies that are both ethical and sustainable. It is composed of two parts:

Part 1: Sustainable Consumption and Product Development
- Challenges in Responsible Marketing
- Consumer-Driven Development

Part 2: Ethical Marketing and Communication Tools
- Marketing as Culture and Practice
- Avoiding Greenwashing and Greenhushing

Course 2.3: Sustainable finances & reporting

This course aims to provide a deep understanding of sustainable finance and reporting, equipping participants with the knowledge and tools to drive sustainability in their organizations. It is composed of two parts:

Part 1: Critical Perspectives on Capital Markets and Sustainable Financing
- Overview of Sustainable Finance
- Traditional vs. Sustainable Finance
- Regulatory Frameworks and Compliance
- Tools for Sustainable Financing

Part 2: Advanced Sustainable Reporting
- Introduction to Sustainable Reporting. GRI, CSRD-Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
- Measurement and Reporting
- Beyond ESG Standards
- Dual materiality analysis
- SDG Impact assessment tool

COMPONENT 3 – SUSTAINABLE PROCESSES & APPROACHES (35%)

This component examines how organisations can adopt sustainable processes and approaches to improve their environmental and social impact. Through key topics such as sustainable innovation, the circular economy and carbon and water footprint management, participants will learn how to integrate sustainable practices into their daily operations. The component addresses both the challenges and opportunities that arise when transforming business processes, highlighting how resource efficiency and the adoption of new technologies and business models can drive long-term sustainability. Using a practical and strategic approach, managers will be empowered to apply these concepts in their organisations, facilitating the transition to a more sustainable future.

Course 3.1: Innovation processes for more sustainable business

The aim of the course is for students to acquire knowledge and understanding of how innovation processes can be organised to develop more sustainability and gender equality in business. The course also provides knowledge of methods used to identify challenges and possibilities for innovation processes and projects related to more sustainable business. A systems perspective on innovation processes gives insights into the influence of the entire value chain, from flows of raw

material to consumption, on the transformation of a business towards increased sustainability. It includes two parts:

Part 1: Innovation and experimentation:
Different types of innovations and innovation processes; Innovation management and project management; Immersion in business model innovation; Business model experimentation

Part 2: Sustainability innovation:
Distinct features of innovation processes and projects for sustainability; Integration of knowledge from previous courses: How to apply sustainability expertise to manage sustainability innovations

Course 3.2: Introduction to the Circular Economy

This course will provide an introduction to the circular economy, covering its basic concepts as well as the relevant policies and its impact on society. It will also address the implementation and management of the circular economy. This will help you learn how to manage and grow a sustainable business by integrating circular economy principles into your strategies.
This course will cover the following topics:

- Circular economy: concept and its policies.
- Circular economy and society.
- The implementation of Circular economy.
- Managing the circular economy.
- European Union legislation: circular economy action plan and circular economy strategy.

Course 3.3: Efficiency & footprint: Water

The course will introduce the basic concepts of environmental sustainability, impact assessment and footprints, focusing on climate change and water footprint tools. It will provide an overview of practical applications for assessment of the water footprint which, by identifying the critical points, will allow to implement mitigation measures aiming to reduce the usage of water and improve water efficiency. The final goal of the course is then to provide tools for water footprint assessment, allowing to critically reflect and understand how to reduce water consumption without compromising performance.

Part 1. Introduction to environmental impacts and assessment and footprints.

- Environmental sustainability and impacts.
- Climate change and climatic risks.
- Global warming and its links to the usage of water
- Environmental impacts assessment, the life cycle approach and the environmental footprints.
- Climate strategies.

Part 2. Water footprint assessment

- Water footprint: concepts, principles, methodology, practical application.
- Water footprint tools and standards.
- Hands-on training: Specific cases of water footprint calculation.

Part 3. Reporting the Water footprint

- Reporting and criteria for communication.

    − European Union regulation; sustainability reporting standards.

Course 3.4: Efficiency & footprint: Carbon

The course will introduce the basic concepts of environmental sustainability, impact assessment and footprints, focusing on climate change and carbon footprint tools. It will provide an overview of practical applications for assessment of the carbon footprint which, by identifying the critical points, will allow to implement mitigation measures aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve energy efficiency. The final goal of the course is then to provide tools for carbon footprint assessment, allowing to critically reflect and understand how to reduce energy consumption without compromising performance.

Part 1. Introduction to environmental impacts and assessment and footprints.
- Environmental sustainability and impacts.
- Climate change and climatic risks.
- Global warming and its links to energy, transportation, construction, industrial and food systems.
- Environmental impacts assessment, the life cycle approach and the environmental footprints.
- Climate and energy policy landscape; decarbonization strategies.

Part 2. Carbon footprint assessment
- Product and organizational carbon footprint: concepts, principles, methodology, practical application.
- Carbon footprint tools and standards.
- Emission reduction projects, carbon footprint offset mechanisms.
- Hands-on training: Specific cases of carbon footprint calculation.

Part 3. Reporting the Carbon footprint
- Reporting and criteria for communication.
- European Union regulation; sustainability reporting standards in relation to climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation.

COMPONENT 4 – FINAL REPORT (3-10 ECTS)

Portfolio exam bringing different course elements from components 1-3 together with a critical analysis of the professionals' own organization/case and concluding recommendations.

3   Pedagogic Methodology

The training program for business managers employs a comprehensive and blended approach to ensure practical and impactful learning. The program is originally created in English and adapted to the languages of the regions involved to maximize impact while retaining transferability to other regions. This approach ensures that the training is accessible and relevant to a diverse audience.

The pedagogic methodology integrates a variety of instructional methods, including:
1. **Case Studies**: Utilizing ARIES4 cases, both European and regional, to provide real-world scenarios that are highly relevant to the participants. This method helps managers apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations, enhancing their problem-solving skills.

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2. **Self-Assessment Tool**: An online tool that allows firms to self-diagnose their sustainability-related activities and impact. As companies use the tool, a database is created that enables benchmarking and integration with the regional S4 monitoring tool. Originally created in English, this tool will be adapted to the languages of the regions involved to maximize impact while retaining transferability to other regions. Participants will receive feedback from their assessments through a combination of automated and personalized methods:

   a) **Automated Feedback**: The online self-assessment tool will provide immediate, automated feedback based on the responses entered by participants. This feedback will include a summary of their sustainability-related activities and impact, highlighting areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.
   b) **Benchmarking Reports**: As the tool collects data, it will generate benchmarking reports that allow participants to compare their performance against regional and industry standards. These reports will help participants understand how they stack up against their peers and identify best practices.
   c) **Personalized Feedback**: Local facilitators will review the assessment results and provide personalized feedback during face-to-face or online sessions. This feedback will be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the participants' enterprises, offering actionable insights and recommendations.
   d) **Follow-Up Discussions**: Group discussions and individual consultations will be organized to delve deeper into the assessment results. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions, share experiences, and receive guidance on implementing improvements

   By combining these feedback mechanisms, the program ensures that participants receive comprehensive and actionable insights to enhance their sustainability practices and overall performance.

3. **Video-Recorded Lectures**: Featuring theoretical presentations from ARIES4 partner institutions, these prerecorded videos are accessible to all locations. They are combined with local facilitation to ensure contextual understanding and engagement. Where relevant, modules will be prepared into the local language, e.g. using AI-supported simultaneous translation tools, which will allow even participants with lower levels of English fluency to benefit from the learning.
4. **Face-to-Face Sessions**: These sessions are crucial for fostering engagement, networking, and hands-on interaction. They are led by local facilitators who guide discussions and activities, making the learning experience more interactive and personal.
5. **Online Learning**: To accommodate participants from different regions, the program includes online components. This format offers flexibility and scalability, allowing experts from the four regions to participate in each local edition of the course. As for the video lectures, local language adaptations will be included where relevant.
6. **Group Discussions and Individual Projects**: These activities encourage collaboration and individual reflection. Participants work on projects tied to their enterprises, enabling them to directly relate the course content to their organizational realities.

7. **Digital Skills Emphasis**: The program highlights the importance of digital skills in the transition to modern business practices. This focus ensures that managers are equipped with the necessary tools to navigate the digital landscape effectively.

The methodology used in this training program offers several pedagogical advantages for business managers:

1. **Practical Application**: By incorporating case studies and individual projects tied to participants' enterprises, the program ensures that theoretical knowledge is directly applied to real-world scenarios. This enhances the relevance and retention of the material.
2. **Flexibility and Accessibility**: The blend of face-to-face and online learning accommodates diverse schedules and geographic locations. This flexibility allows managers to participate without significant disruption to their professional responsibilities.
3. **Engagement and Interaction**: Face-to-face sessions foster engagement, networking, and hands-on interaction, which are crucial for deep learning and relationship building. Group discussions and collaborative projects further enhance these interactions.
4. **Personalized Learning**: The use of a self-assessment tool provides tailored feedback, helping participants identify their strengths and areas for improvement. Personalized feedback from facilitators ensures that learning is relevant to each manager's context.
5. **Benchmarking and Continuous Improvement**: The self-assessment tool's benchmarking feature allows participants to compare their performance with peers, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and best practice sharing.
6. **Digital Skills Development**: Emphasizing digital skills prepares managers for the evolving business landscape, equipping them with the tools needed to navigate and leverage digital technologies effectively.
7. **Multilingual and Culturally Adapted Content**: By adapting the program to the languages and cultural contexts of different regions, the training is more accessible and impactful, ensuring that the content resonates with a diverse audience.
8. **Expert Insights**: The inclusion of video-recorded lectures from ARIES4 partner institutions and participation of regional experts enriches the learning experience with diverse perspectives and cutting-edge knowledge.

Overall, this methodology supports a holistic and practical learning experience, enabling business managers to enhance their skills, apply new knowledge effectively, and drive positive change within their organizations. Pilot tests of the program will be conducted to refine the methodology, ensuring it aligns with participant needs and enhances learning outcomes.

4   ECTS weighing

Given local differences in the number of ECTS that can and have to be allocated to the final report, this training programme does not provide specific ECTS per course, but indicative weighing of each programme component. Each local partner will therefore independently assign ECTS credits to each course in the local region to fit local administrative regulations.

5   Final remarks

The resulting training programme is an outcome of the collaborative work between the ARIES4 partners, combining their respective expertise. Each institution has collected feedback on initial versions of the programme from academic experts external to the task, as well as from potential participants (i.e. corporate professionals). The feedback has been integrated in a revised version of the training programme where possible. The contents of this training programme will be pilot tested in Spring 2025 among local partners, and the learnings of this testing will be incorporated in an additional revision of the programme if needed.

COORDINATOR & FULL PARTNERS

ASSOCIATE PARTNERS