JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
School of Education and Communication

Making room for change: Student Associations' Engagement in Sustainability

The Case of Jönköping University

AUTHOR: *Mette Heida*
SUPERVISOR: *Radu Dinu*
EXAMINER: *Jean-Bosco Habyarimana*
COURSE: *Master's Thesis 1 in Global Studies, 15 credits*
PROGRAMME: *Global Studies: Sustainable Societies and Social Change (One Year)*
JÖNKÖPING: *Spring 2025*

Summary/Abstract

This thesis explores the current presence of sustainability within student associations at Jönköping University (JU). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are seen as key agents for promoting sustainable mindsets and behaviours. Student associations, as informal learning environments positioned between the university and students, offer unique potential for creating lasting sustainable change. Research in this area is still underdeveloped. This research aims to assess the current perception of sustainability within JU's student associations and identify pathways for development. Employing a constructivist approach, the study is a case study focused exclusively on Jönköping University. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 board members from student associations, to explore how sustainability is understood, prioritized, and implemented from their perspective. The qualitative interview data was analysed using thematic analysis, guided by the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Framework and Stakeholder Theory.

Key findings indicate that associations generally emphasize inclusivity and diversity, although the disconnect between Swedish and international students remains a prevailing issue. Environmental sustainability is considered, with practices like reuse being adopted, but implementation is inconsistent. Economic sustainability is primarily understood as careful spending, with low awareness of ethical or sustainable procurement and decisions often based on cost and convenience. Students are considered the primary stakeholders, and internal decisions are largely inclusive and democratic. Although policies are publicly accessible, awareness and perceived practicality are low. The main barriers to advancing sustainability are a lack of time and a lack of concrete knowledge and ideas, rather than financial constraints. Additionally, boards typically feel they are "sufficiently sustainable." Despite these challenges, there is a strong openness to external support and concrete opportunities for improvement were identified. Suggestions include developing practical tools like a handbook or checklist, providing centralized resources, campus-wide incentives, improving policy accessibility, and promoting peer-to-peer learning.

In conclusion, the study highlights that while JU student associations have positive steps in social sustainability, environmental and economic aspects require more systematic integration. Moving forward requires accessible resources, practical guidance, and incentives from the university and student union to overcome identified barriers and shift sustainability from an optional consideration to a core principle.

Keywords: *Student associations, Sustainability, Triple bottom line, Stakeholder theory*

Total number of words: 13,957

Abbreviations

EQO	Equal Opportunities
HEI	Higher Education Institution
JU	Jönköping University
JSU	Jönköping Student Union
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
TBL	Triple Bottom Line
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SHE	Sustainability in Higher Education
SSA	Students for Sustainable Action
ST	Stakeholder Theory
UN	United Nations
WIA	Whole Institution Approach

Table of Contents

Summary/Abstract **2**
Abbreviations **3**
Table of Contents **5**
Introduction **4**
Research Goal and Question **6**
Motivation and Purpose 6
Research Aim 7
Research Question 7
SDGs 8
Literature Review **9**
Student Societies 11
Theoretical Framework **12**
Triple Bottom Line 12
Stakeholder Theory 13
Epistemology 14
Methodology **15**
Research setting 15
Associations overview 15
Data collection 16
Interviews 16
Participants 17
Alternatives 18
Data analysis 18
Ethical considerations 19
Bias 19
Results: Empirical Data from the Interviews **21**
1. Current Efforts Towards Sustainability 21
1.1 Social Sustainability 21
1.2 Environmental Sustainability 24
1.3 Economic Sustainability 26
2. Organisational Considerations and Input 29
2.1 Board Diversity 29
2.2 Decision-Making Processes 31
2.3 Stakeholders 32
2.4 Sustainability Policies 36
3. Moving Towards Change 38
3.1 Complications 38
3.2 Support & Ideas 39
Discussion: Data Analysis **42**
How Student Associations Perceive and Prioritize Sustainability 42
Environmental Sustainability (Planet) 43
Economic Sustainability (Profit) 43
How Boards Make Decisions and Involve Stakeholders 44

Stakeholder Engagement....44
Transparency and Communication.... 44
Decision-Making Processes....45
The Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development.... 45
Challenges.... 45
Opportunities....46
Conclusion.... 47
Opportunities for improvement....48
Limitations and Future Research.... 48
References....51
Appendix....58
Appendix A
Information Sheet Interview.... 58
Appendix B
Consent Form.... 60
Appendix C
Interview Guide.... 61

Figures

Figure 1: Student Associations under Jönköping Student Union....15
Figure 2: List of participants....17

Introduction

In a world where climate change has become an integral part of public, scientific and political discourse, the question of sustainability and sustainability improvements has become indispensable as well. It is not confined to a single institution or region; it represents a universal commitment to building a more equitable, resilient, and environmentally conscious world. Achieving such global sustainability goals requires widespread collaboration across educational institutions, organizations, and communities worldwide. For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the presence of sustainability might even be more crucial, as HEIs are responsible for shaping the leaders of tomorrow. During their academic journey, students are particularly open to new ideas and values, which, combined with the fact that a big part of the population has been a student at some point in their lives (Approximately 40 percent of all inhabitants in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries have received tertiary education, and this number continues to grow (Adult Education Level | OECD, 2022.), makes universities powerful agents for promoting sustainable mindsets and behaviours. As these educated individuals enter various sectors of society, their understanding of sustainability can have lasting, far-reaching impacts. However, while HEIs are positioned as key drivers of social change with their ability to develop future leaders who can innovate and tackle complex societal challenges, current programs often fall short in aligning with all the communal and SDG-related goals (Douglas, 2015).

This thesis approaches the challenge of sustainable development in education from the angle of student associations. Since they are positioned between the university and the students, they have a unique potential to create lasting sustainable change. Student associations are spaces where students come together around shared interests, exchange knowledge, and grow through social experience. These groups provide informal yet highly impactful support networks that foster emotional, intellectual, and social development (Borges, Cezarino, et al., 2017). Research shows that students typically gain their first exposure to sustainability through associations, rather than through formal coursework (Sommier et al., 2022). Within these communities, students not only develop key competencies such as systems thinking, ethical responsibility, and strategic planning, but also cultivate a sense of belonging, confidence, and agency (Castellanos, 2015; Krasny & Delia, 2015). These characteristics make Student organizations fertile grounds for sustainable action. There are plenty of examples of them doing just that, organizing volunteer work, eco-friendly events, and partnerships with NGOs (Nwokwu & Odoh, 2024), all of which contribute to broader societal impact and help students align with the goals of the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development (Borges, Ferreira, et al., 2017). Furthermore, the local nature of the associations enables students to engage directly with real-world issues, making sustainability personal, actionable, and meaningful. Ultimately, the fact that student associations serve as social groups makes them powerful platforms for experiential learning and long-term transformation, not just in individuals but in institutions and society at large (Duram & Williams, 2015). However, even though student associations promote the perfect atmosphere for sustainable change, little research has gone into this matter.

Although it is well known that students have the potential to play a significant role in promoting sustainability, the role played by student organizations and especially associations in this regard has not received enough attention in the academic literature, suggesting that researchers have not fully taken advantage of these groups' contributions and effects (Borges, Ferreira, et al., 2017; Davidovitch & Dorot, 2023; Lee et al., 2023; Murray, 2018). In comparison to staff- or faculty-driven programs, there is a shortage of research that specifically concentrates on student-led, co-curricular initiatives. Additionally, there is a lack of empirical knowledge regarding the overall activity and contribution of student associations to higher education institutions (Davidovitch & Dorot, 2023; Lee et al., 2023). Therefore, additional research is necessary to evaluate the performance of student organizations on both collective and individual levels, as well as to understand the diversity and effectiveness of their activities (Borges, Cezarino, et al., 2017; Borges, Ferreira, et al., 2017).

When it comes to Jönköping University specifically, they have one policy related to sustainability. This document sets the direction, objectives, and approach for sustainability work at the university. However, this is just a framework, and does not provide any concrete detailed measures or action plans.

This research positions itself as a bridge to a critical gap in the existing literature by providing a focused and context-specific examination of student organizations' performance in sustainability. By focusing specifically on student organizations, this research directly addresses the "understudied stakeholder group" of students in the sustainability in higher education (SHE) literature. It provides concrete examples of the types and diversity of activities undertaken by student organizations (Murray, 2018). Additionally, by focusing on a Swedish university, the study offers detailed empirical knowledge on the activity and contribution of student associations within a specific national and institutional context.

Research Goal and Question

Motivation and Purpose

This thesis seeks to assess the current perception of sustainability within JU's student associations, as well as identify potential pathways for development. The research aims to provide a structured overview of how student associations at JU align with sustainability values, both those of the university and beyond.

The rationale for selecting this research topic is that additional research is necessary to evaluate the performance of student organizations on a collective and individual level, as well as the diversity of their activities (Borges, Cezarino, et al., 2017; Karimi & Matous, 2018). In addition, there is a personal aspect to the research. As a student at JU as well as a member of SSA, I have close connections to the researched associations, which makes this project both contextually relevant and personally significant. This direct connection serves as a driving force throughout the research process, as it allows me to focus on making a tangible impact within my own university environment. By selecting a personal and practical topic, I aim to ensure my findings' relevance and applicability, hopefully increasing the chances that they are genuinely useful in promoting positive change at JU. Additionally, through my contacts, I can streamline the process of finding and recruiting interviewees.

With the use of this research, SSA will be better equipped to develop a task force that supports the other associations of JU in implementing lasting sustainable measures. As the associations become more sustainable, they will not only create positive change through their measures, but hopefully also through their members, as increased exposure to sustainability might lead to personal shifts in perspective and behaviour of the general students. In this way, local actions can contribute to broader global objectives. Ultimately, while this study is grounded in the context of JU, its findings have the potential to inform broader discussions about the role of educational institutions in fostering sustainable change. It underscores the importance of creating locally relevant and globally conscious environments, promoting a more interconnected approach to sustainability.

Research Aim

Despite JU's commitment to sustainability and its established strategies, there is limited knowledge about how these objectives are reflected within student associations. This study aims to bridge that gap by offering a structured overview of how associations consider sustainability in their operations. It also aims to identify why not more measures are taken

and what could be provided to support them in becoming more sustainable. To further know how changes can best be implemented with the highest impact, this research also aims to understand the decision-making processes of the associations, including stakeholder consideration. This thesis generates empirical data and proposes practical solutions. As sustainability within student bodies remains an underexplored area, the findings contribute new knowledge while offering practical guidance.

Research Question

The primary research question guiding this research is:

How do student associations at Jönköping University perceive, implement, and manage sustainability in their operations, and what opportunities and challenges do they face in advancing sustainable development?

To tackle this question, the study will answer four sub-questions:

1. *How do student associations perceive and prioritize sustainability in their operations?*

This question aims to answer how the student associations perceive sustainability, whether it is a priority and if it is incorporated in the organisational mindset. This will provide insights in the current situation of the associations when it comes to sustainability.

2. *What sustainability initiatives are currently being implemented within JU's student associations?*

This question aims to provide a clear overview of the current efforts implemented by the associations towards sustainability, working as both a guideline and inspiration for future ideas.

3. *How do the boards of the student associations operate when it comes to their decisions and stakeholders?*

This question aims to uncover the decision-making processes of the association. This will show where change is needed and can best be implemented for the most sustainable impact.

4. *What are the challenges and opportunities for the sustainable development of the student associations?*

This question aims to guide the university, the union, and the associations by providing a concrete insights on the current obstacles and opportunities towards sustainable change.

The research is a case study, focusing exclusively on Jönköping University. Given the limited timeframe, the study tried to involve as many board representatives as possible by inviting each association to nominate one member for a semi-structured interview. With the constructivist approach to the research design, specifically, semi-structured interviews, this study does not seek to establish an external or definitive assessment of sustainability. Instead, it explores how sustainability is understood, prioritized, and implemented within student associations at Jönköping University. The primary audience for the results is SSA, other student associations, and JU's students and staff. However, the insights gained may also prove valuable to other universities looking to enhance their sustainability practices, as there is currently little to no research done into the sustainability perceptions and influences of student associations.

SDGs

The SDGs most crucial to this research are the following. First, there is SDG 4, Quality Education, and specifically 4.7, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong sustainable learning opportunities for all. This research contributes to a more inclusive and equitable learning environment through the increased representation of sustainability in student associations. Then this research also includes SDG 10, Reduced Inequalities, and specifically goal 10.2, which focuses on empowering and promoting the social, economic, and political inclusion of all. This research looks into the social sustainability of the associations and points out areas of improvement towards this SDG. Additionally, this research concerns SDG 13, Climate Action, with goal 13.3 calling for improved education and awareness-raising on climate change, adaptation, and impact reduction. Lastly, this thesis involves SDG 16, peace, justice, and strong institutions, with 16.7 working towards responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels, which includes the very local level of association boards (United Nations, 2015).

Literature Review

The pressure on higher education institutions (HEIs) to promote sustainable development has long existed (Aleixo et al., 2018; Casarejos et al., 2017; Clugston & Calder, 1999.; Elmassah et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2005; United Nations, 1992; Zilahy & Huisingh, 2009). In the case of Sweden, HEIs are legally mandated to work for sustainable development (Sammalisto & Lindhqvist, 2008).

This pressure is put on HEIs for several reasons. One of the main arguments is that HEIs are responsible for educating students who will become future managers and leaders in all kinds of fields, as Aleixo et al. (2018) describe it. In addition, Henderson et al. (2022) express that this responsibility of sustainability is also related to the fact that HEIs are expected to develop and disseminate new knowledge to their students, communities, and society broadly, and sustainability is no exception. Kohl et al. (2021) highlight another reason why HEIs are equipped to be on the front line of sustainable change; they argue that HEIs can, because they contain most aspects of society, act as living labs. As a microcosm, they elaborate, HEIs can explore sustainable lifestyles and document the benefits of sustainability practices.

Research by Aleixo et al. (2018) and Brzezicki and Jasiolek (2021) shows that, because of these aforementioned reasons, HEIs are expected to act as agents of sustainable change by their students and other stakeholders. Because of these high expectations, many frameworks have been established to analyse the sustainability of HEIs (Findler et al., 2019; Menon & Suresh, 2022; Waheed et al., 2011). Such analyses try to shed light on the best ways to achieve sustainability within HEIs and the barriers they face.

Several researchers, such as Erguvan (2024) and Fekih Zguir et al. (2021), emphasize that a valuable way for the HEIs to embed their students with sustainable knowledge and values is through education on sustainability. Erguvan explains that Content-based instruction (CBI) significantly improves students' sustainability literacy, which they argue to be evident by improved knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards sustainability concepts. Fekih Zguir et al.'s findings align with these, as they acknowledge positive short- and long-term results, where education enhances students' behaviour towards their environment and their community.

These arguments in favour of formal education on sustainability are in line with the approaches of Christou et al. (2024) and Kohl et al. (2021). However, they do not perceive this to be enough and instead take it a step further and argue that for HEIs transformation to

be sustainable, they need to apply a Whole-Institution Approach (WIA) towards sustainability. A WIA in HEIs means going beyond the curriculum and involves aspects such as teaching content and methodology, learning processes, facilities, operations, governance, capacity-building, and stakeholder interactions. Research by Kohl et al. shows that through the use of WIA, HEIs have the opportunity to implement sustainability beyond specific project goals and instead spark broader discussions and involve all stakeholders to be a part of the change.

Next to formal education, there are thus different ways to embed the students with sustainable knowledge and values. A case study by Sommier et al. (2022) reveals that, unlike the expectation set for HEI, most students learned about sustainability not from high school or university courses but rather from student associations and other personal networks. The influence of student associations is further discussed by Davidovitch and Dorot (2023), whose study reveals that the activities of student associations significantly contribute to students' academic ambitions. The more activities are organized, the higher the motivation and self-efficacy are among students. They continue that student associations create positive social-emotional factors, which can further enhance learning outcomes. According to studies by Borges, Cezarino, et al. (2017) and Borges, Ferreira, et al. (2017), student associations are also a key aspect for the sustainable development of students. They highlight how student associations act as informal learning environments that empower students to build a community while they are provided with practical experience and exposed to sustainable and interpersonal values.

Student associations can also play a vital role in linking domestic and international students, and foster their integration. Research by Encinas (2016) discusses how associations bridge a gap, on one side they help domestic students who are often unaware of the benefits of international interactions, and on the other side are international students who do not always have the opportunity to connect as they would like to. Furthermore, this research connected international students to have more psychological effects than domestic students.

In the implementation of sustainability, HEIs run into a variety of barriers. In research by Weiss et al. (2021), it was found that the most common barriers are related to a lack of interdisciplinary competence among faculty, as well as related to an absence of sustainability in the institutional vision. A multi-case study by Hudler (2021) shows that when it comes to social sustainability, the main barriers include persistent oppressive ideologies, restrictive policy language, and limited student agency. In their exploratory study, Aleixo et al. (2018) found that there are even more obstacles to sustainable development, including budgetary

constraints, deeply ingrained organizational structures, low stakeholder engagement, conceptual misunderstanding, curriculum difficulties, outside pressure, and more.

Going beyond HEIs, universities are not the only ones that can support the development of sustainable mindsets and initiatives. Wolf et al. (2021) explore how both universities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have the opportunity to set up infrastructures and services that provide grassroots initiatives with minimal institutionalisation, thereby empowering them at a niche level to connect and move towards a global niche. This is not outside the usual scope of NGOs. Abiddin et al. (2022) identify them to be essential in promoting sustainable community development. NGOs help build communities that maintain a balance between environmental concerns and development objectives, while they strengthen local social relationships. NGOs are, as Arhin (2016) states, essential for sustainable progress because of their unique traits; they are non-partisan, non-profit, and close to grassroots initiatives.

Student Societies

Given this past research, it is evident that there has been an emphasis on university-based support, regarding sustainability, but not much emphasis on support provided by or to student societies. This lack of coverage of students societies roles in the promotion of sustainability is the gap this research seeks to address. Student societies are also referred to as clubs or associations. They can be defined as "a community engaged in the task of educating itself" (Gallagher & Gilmore, 2013). Student societies are an important dimension of student experience on campus and represent the wide cultural interests of the student body (Loader et al., 2015). They are a variety of groups typically supported by the Students' Union. Student societies are primarily run by and for the students themselves. They are prevalent across many higher education institutions (HEIs) and cover a wide range of student interests, including those related to specific subject areas (such as marketing, engineering, politics), charitable concerns, and recreational activities like theatre, music, travel, dance, or sport. Student societies can influence their members in numerous ways, offering potential positive benefits and outcomes, although their full value may be currently under-realised (Gallagher & Gilmore, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Before going deeper into the research, it is beneficial to discuss the meaning of sustainability. It is essential to aim for sustainability to be achieved in its broadest sense, not only concerning the environment, but also including the social and political aspects. The United Nations (UN), when creating its sustainable development goals (SDGs), stated that they are ‘’the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice’’ (United Nations, n.d.). Sustainability, as defined by the UN, is thus a matter of social, environmental, and economic harmony. Continuing this definition, in the case of this thesis, sustainable development refers to an integrated approach that takes into consideration environmental concerns along with economic and social development. There are numerous contexts and perspectives from which to view sustainability challenges. To more concretely assess the sustainability efforts of student associations at Jönköping University, this research uses two primary frameworks: the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Framework and Stakeholder Theory. These frameworks combined provide both a structured breakdown of sustainability efforts and an inclusive perspective on stakeholder engagement.

Triple Bottom Line

The Triple Bottom Line Framework (Jeurissen, 2000) is a theoretical analysis of sustainability that focuses on the importance of balancing social, environmental, and economic factors. It fits the assessment of student associations, as it is easily applicable to small organizations that move towards a positive impact while working with limited resources. The TBL framework evaluates sustainability through three dimensions. The first dimension is People. This is about social sustainability and includes aspects such as promoting inclusivity, fostering a sense of community, and encouraging participation. Within the associations, it includes how well they engage their members, as well as how they address the diverse needs and contribute to student well-being. The second dimension is Planet. The key here is environmental sustainability, which involves initiatives related to waste reduction, energy efficiency, sustainable event planning, and creating environmental awareness. For the student associations, such efforts to minimize their ecological footprint are often challenged by resource limitations. The third dimension of the TBL is Profit. This part is concerned with economic sustainability and deals with assessing financial planning, fundraising efforts, and ensuring long-term viability. The importance of financial sustainability for student associations lies in the fact that it allows associations to support their social and environmental initiatives

continuously. However, economic sustainability also considers the decisions one makes about where to spend money and the causes they support.

Stakeholder Theory

The second part of the theoretical framework is the Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010), which emphasizes the importance of considering the needs and interests of stakeholders. This theory is very relevant to the research because student associations are very dependent on their stakeholders. They have to be able to balance the interests of various groups, including students, the student union, faculty, staff, university, local communities, and potential sponsors. By acknowledging and addressing the diverse interests of their stakeholders, associations can develop more comprehensive and effective sustainability strategies. The Stakeholder theory involves several key aspects. The first part of the theory is stakeholder engagement, which concerns how the associations interact with their stakeholders, particularly students, faculty, and the local community. This includes analysing the inclusivity of the association's activities and how well it addresses the varying needs of its members. This section is closely connected to the People dimension of the TBL. The second part of the stakeholder theory is transparency and communication, which assesses how associations communicate their goals, activities, and efforts. And lastly, there is inclusivity in decision-making, which is about how associations incorporate the feedback of stakeholders into their practices. Ensuring that all voices are heard can enhance the association's overall sustainability by promoting a participatory approach.

Combining the TBL Framework and Stakeholder Theory provides a firm foundation for assessing sustainability within student associations. While the TBL Framework offers clear criteria for evaluating social, environmental, and economic sustainability, Stakeholder Theory ensures that sustainability initiatives are relevant, supported, and effectively integrated into the association's operations. Together, these frameworks guide the development of interview questions and the analysis of the findings, ensuring a thorough assessment of sustainability efforts at Jönköping University, which acknowledges the complexity and multiple dimensions of sustainability.

To support these theories in the assessment of sustainability, the SDGs are used for additional perspective as they provide a globally recognized, comprehensive framework for sustainability that enhances the credibility and relevance. It also supports student associations in contributing meaningfully to broader sustainability goals. Lastly, another influence is the policies of JU, to determine whether the student associations operate under them.

Epistemology

Epistemologically, this study adopts a constructivist approach. Constructivism holds that knowledge is not passively observed but actively constructed through social processes, interactions, and shared meanings. Understanding how student associations perceive and implement sustainability initiatives requires acknowledging that their practices and perceptions are shaped by complex, evolving social processes rather than existing as objective realities.

Drawing on Law's (2004) concept of method assemblage, this research recognizes that traditional research methods often oversimplify social complexities by forcing them into predefined frameworks. Instead, Law advocates for embracing the inherent messiness of social realities, acknowledging that governance, policies, and community engagement are continually reshaped through interactions, negotiations, and shifting power dynamics. This perspective aligns well with the constructivist view that knowledge is co-created rather than discovered, particularly, when examining collaborative sustainability efforts between student associations and the university

The semi-structured interviews used in this study reflect the epistemological stance, allowing participants to express their experiences, values, and perspectives on sustainability in their own words. This approach not only provides rich qualitative data but also respects the multiplicity of voices involved in sustainability initiatives. Additionally, by comparing findings from JU's associations with the literature and theoretical framework, the research constructs a context-specific understanding of sustainability that acknowledges the diversity of practices and perceptions within the associations, and that can support both policy and practice.

Lastly, this research acknowledges the influence of the researcher's positionality. Law noted that prior involvement, such as my involvement with the SSA, unavoidably affects the research process and the knowledge produced. Recognizing this positionality is crucial for maintaining transparency and acknowledging how their background influences interpretations and findings. Ultimately, this means that the interviews do not exist in a vacuum, and therefore the answers are not only created by the interviewees. As the researcher, I influence the answers and, together, we are co-creators in the production of new knowledge.

Methodology

The research started by building a foundation of literature and frameworks. The literature covers the current situation of sustainability development in HEIs and the workings of organisations. The theoretical frameworks were picked based on relevance and to what extent they can be applied to sustainability within student associations.

Research setting

Associations overview

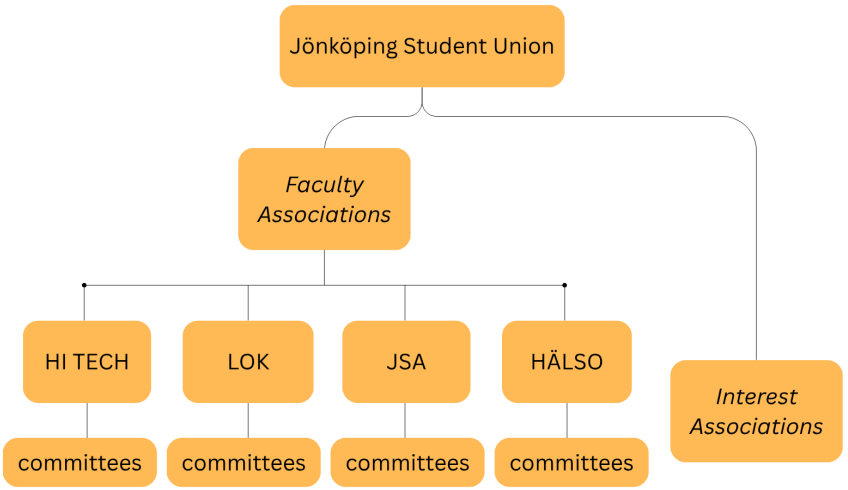

Figure 1: Student Associations under Jönköping Student Union

The Jönköping Student Union (JSU) is responsible for all the types of student associations at JU. All associations under the Student Union are run by student involvement and are supported by JSU with advice and financial resources whenever needed. Once students are enrolled at JU, they are required to become a member of JSU. At the same time as they become a member of the Jönköping Student Union, they also become part of the Student Association that operates at their school. These school-linked associations will in this thesis be referred to as faculty associations. The faculty associations act as an extension of JSU, their goal is to represent and support all the students of their faculty and ensure that their needs are recognized by JSU. Seeing as there are four schools at JU, there are four faculty associations. These faculty associations can have several committees under them that work on a broad variety of projects. These committees are also the ones that organize most of the events of the faculty associations.

Next to that, JSU has 22 interest associations directly underneath them. These associations are open to join by students from all faculties and are based on shared interests such as hobbies, sports, entertainment, and many more. The interest associations are smaller than the faculty associations and do not have their own committees. The concept is that every student can join an association that fits their interest, and if they don't find any that appeals to them, they can start their own interest association. The board members of the interest associations participating in this thesis were from associations related to games, e-sports, sustainability, international community, and creative arts.

Data collection

Interviews

An email was sent to the boards of all the student associations of JU, asking for a 60-minute interview with one of their members. In this message, the boards were provided with information on the research as well as example topics to allow them to discuss the current situation and have time to retrieve relevant information (for the interview information sheet, see Appendix A). Before the interview, the participants were asked to consent to a consent form (see Appendix B). Through communication, they were encouraged to participate in person, by meeting at a study room on campus, but they were also given the possibility to meet online to increase their chances of participating.

The interview questions are based on the theoretical framework. They refer both to their work towards change, related to the TBL, and to how the associations operate, related to the ST. The questions are constructed to align with the framework's categories, ensuring comprehensive data collection (for the interview guide, see Appendix C). The interviews are semi-structured, including closed-ended questions (Banha et al., 2022), as they provide clear, structured responses that are easy to compare and analyse (Brett, 2021). The closed questions are supported by open-ended questions to explain why the current citation is like that, as well as allow space for the board members to address challenges, opportunities, and other relevant comments.

To facilitate the collection of rich and meaningful data, the open interview questions are designed following proper interview practices (Brett, 2021). The interviews use open-ended, assumption-free, and neutral questions to allow participants to express their views freely. The questions are clear, jargon-free, and single-focused to prevent confusion and encourage detailed responses. The interview structure begins with general and experience-based questions, followed by in-depth discussions on sustainability efforts and challenges. Sensitive or complex topics are introduced later in the conversation when rapport has been

established. This approach ensures that data collection remains comprehensive and reflective of participants' genuine perspectives on sustainability within student associations at Jönköping University.

Participants

The interviews were conducted with 11 students with a variety of student roles. 5 participants were board members of faculty associations, an additional 5 were board members of interest associations, and the last interviewee was the president of the student union. While this represents a small sample relative to the total number of associations (22 interest and 4 faculty associations, with all approximately 5 board members), the sample was strategically selected to maximize diversity and coverage across different types of student organizations at Jönköping University.

One board member was interviewed per association (except in the case of 2 participants from one faculty association), as this approach was deemed sufficient to provide informed insight into each board's sustainability practices, decision-making processes, and perceived challenges. Board members typically share collective responsibilities and are familiar with ongoing initiatives, making them suitable representatives for capturing the overall orientation of their associations.

All the names of the participants have been anonymized, in the empirical data section they will be referred to as Participant A, Participant B, etc.

Figure 2: List of participants

Association Type	**School**	**Role**
Faculty	School of Health and Welfare	President
Faculty	School of Education and Communication	Board Member
Faculty	School of Engineering	IT Manager
Faculty	Jönköping International Business School	Head of International
Faculty	Jönköping International Business School	vice president

Figure 2: List of participants		
Interest		President
Interest		President
Interest		Board Member
Interest		Vice President
Interest		Social Media Manager
Union		President

Alternatives

The choice for the interviews to be qualitative was made because it provides the board members with more space to discuss the perception of sustainability within their association. It also allows for a deeper dive into the current situation (Lim, 2025). Conversely, a more quantitative approach could have been applied to this research, such as a survey, but seeing as there is a limited number of board members, it might then make more sense to send a questionnaire to all students of JU. The common perception of sustainability and its practices at the university and in associations would be very interesting, but it is not the intent of this research. My research intends to gain more practical and concrete insights into the current measures taken.

Alternatively, the research could have, instead of being a case study, conducted a comparative study with another university outside Sweden to shed light on differences and similarities, as well as finding possible examples of improvement. This would have been very engaging, as it helps create literature on pathways towards sustainable associations in a Swedish context, but seeing the limited information available about the current state of sustainability in student associations in general, let alone in Sweden, such a study would likely still require in-depth research on the Swedish setting, in addition to research elsewhere, which would be outside the capabilities of this thesis.

Data analysis

The qualitative interview data was analysed using thematic analysis, which was used to focus on the components of the theoretical framework, TBL and ST, as well as opportunities, and challenges related to sustainability within student associations. This approach ensured that the findings are not only reflective of current perceptions, but also useful for identifying areas of improvement. The analysis consisted of several parts (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). The

first stage was familiarization, in this step, the interviews were transcribed and reviewed to gain a general understanding of the data. Then followed coding, where all the data was systematically coded into pieces of commonalities and differences. The coding was done deductively, the pre-defined codes put the theoretical framework at the base. This put focus on the current efforts and organizational practises, as well as opportunities, and challenges. After that, themes were assigned, and refined, while avoiding conceptual overlap, by creating sub-themes. Finally, the analysis concluded with the development of exact definitions and names of the themes (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). The final themes can be found in the table of contents.

Ethical considerations

The interviews are conducted in compliance with recognized ethical guidelines, and all respondents are asked to participate voluntarily and are not compensated for doing so. Each participant receives an informed consent form (see Appendix B) to serve as documentation of their voluntary involvement. They have the opportunity to ask questions before giving written consent. Participants receive comprehensive information about the study through a study information sheet (see Appendix A), discussing the purpose of the study and the measures taken to protect the privacy of the data gathered from this form. Every participant has the freedom to leave the study at any time before its conclusion (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005).

Data protection within this study is ensured through adherence to legal frameworks like the GDPR, secure data handling methods, and ethical research practices to maintain privacy and participant trust. For this research, data protection is particularly relevant, as the study involves interviewing board members of student associations and gathering potentially sensitive information. It is important to ensure that participants' data is protected throughout the research process. Measures like anonymization and pseudonyms are employed to safeguard individual identities, ensuring that data cannot be traced back to specific participants (Cavoukian, 2018). The data is safely stored on a password-protected laptop and will be deleted as soon as the final thesis grade is received.

Bias

While the study is designed to avoid extensive bias from the researcher, it is essential to acknowledge bias and positionality. Constructivism emphasizes that knowledge is co-constructed through interactions between me as a researcher and the participants, rather than being objectively discovered. Therefore, my connection to JU and my motivation to enhance sustainability within its student associations inevitably influence the research

process. As a student at JU and a member of the SSA, my interest in promoting sustainability within the university community provides me with valuable context, but also introduces bias. The desire to contribute positively to sustainability efforts may lead me to be more receptive to responses that align with improvement and change. This personal involvement could also affect how I frame interview questions, interpret responses, and even encourage participants to elaborate on particular topics. Additionally, my status as a JU student may impact how openly participants share their thoughts, potentially enhancing comfort and rapport or, conversely, leading them to present themselves more favourably regarding sustainability. This research is therefore not without bias. The final result is a definition collaboratively constructed by me and the participants. Acknowledging and actively reflecting upon these biases enhances the credibility and transparency of the research.

Results: Empirical Data from the Interviews

While the transcripts of the interviews were studied, 10 themes were found most consistently throughout the interviews, these were synthesised into three overarching themes; Current Efforts Towards Sustainability, Organisational Considerations and Input, and Moving Towards Change. The following sections will explore each of these themes in detail.

1. Current Efforts Towards Sustainability

This theme focuses on the current efforts that work towards more sustainability among the students. Covering the three dimensions of sustainability: social, environmental, and economic. Before that, the general self perceptions of the participants with regard to the sustainable behaviours of their boards will be discussed.

Throughout the interviews, participants shared how sustainable they identified their association to be. The participants had varying perceptions about their own sustainability efforts. Some expressed positive views about their current level of sustainability. Participant F shared ‘’I was pleasantly surprised by how sustainable it kind of was. It is better compared to, you know, like a few other associations.’’ Similarly, Participant A felt their board makes conscious efforts to include sustainability in decision-making, they stated ‘’we really try to be sustainable like’’ and ‘’Obviously, you can always do better, but I think when we took, when we take our decisions in the board, we unconsciously and consciously, we try to be sustainable as much as we can.

Several participants shared they felt they could be more sustainable. Participant A also acknowledged this as they said ‘’Obviously you can always improve, but I don't think we have to change anything right now to be more sustainable.’’ Another board member, Participant C, echoed this by saying ‘’I feel like we have that in mind when we do stuff, and we want to be more sustainable.’’ There is also a shared sense that more could be done, Participant C commented ‘’I feel like in every event there's always a possibility to be more sustainable.’’

In contrast, some participants admitted that sustainability was not a priority or something they often considered. Participant G was particularly candid, saying ‘’Mostly we haven't thought of sustainability at all, (…) it hasn't really crossed my mind at all,’’ but also added ‘’But I feel like we are sustainable enough for it to be acceptable.’’ They continued with, ‘’I don't think we should focus it, of any kind. But it's still it's, I think it's worth thinking about, yeah’’

1.1 Social Sustainability

When talking about social sustainability, the participants discussed Inclusivity, Diversity, and the International Disconnect.

All participants were asked what efforts their boards have that support social sustainability among students. One common theme across the responses was a strong focus on diversity and inclusivity, particularly in the activities the associations organize. Participant H described the inclusive environment promoted by their association: “So people of different age, genders, sexuality, they mix and match and everyone is open to everyone” and stated that “our first priority of [the association] is to be welcome for everyone.” Similarly, participant A emphasized the importance of acceptance within their organization: “Everyone is accepted no matter what, and we are very strict about it, we do not really tolerate any type of (...) discrimination.” They also recognized that this is a vital part of being a student body; ‘’that would be one of our first priorities. Because that's exactly what we are doing this for, to make sure everyone feels like they have a place.’’

The boards of the participants also address inclusivity through practical measures, such as food options at events. Most associations accommodate those with food restrictions. Participant D shared that their association always tries to accommodate dietary restrictions. ‘’We always go for vegan options’’ The sustainability interest association has taken notable steps to promote inclusivity as well. Their board member explained that ‘’during kick-off we were really pushing them throughout many years, that pride is included in the kick-off’’. Additionally, they have launched a menstrual project to support women’s needs: “Also for women, we have our menstrual project. So all schools have at least one toilet with free menstrual products, which is just so helpful and so inclusive.”

An important recent development in the promotion of equal treatment is the formation of EQO, a cross-association task force that includes representatives from every faculty association. As Participant C explained;

> *[EQO] is more or less equal treatment and how we can work towards that everyone has the same opportunity to become a part of [the association] and to be in any association at all the schools. So there's no like ‘You speak English, You should not be picked’ that we try to like, Everyone has the same chances.*

However, when it comes to mental health, there are limited supportive measures from the associations, Participant A, who is ‘’a very passionate person when it comes to mental health’’ noted that ‘’it's quite difficult because people are not that open and mental health is a little bit of a sensitive topic for people to open up with strangers.’’

Still, there is a strong consensus among all the interviewees that the students are the highest priority. Participant A highlighted this mindset when they said ‘’Well we are a student board,

right? So everything that we do, and we plan and everything is for the students.'' And in the words of Participant G; ''We always try to give out to our Members'' An example of this prioritizing mentality is when Participant G shared that though practice with their interest association is important, they tell their members to ''Focus on your studies first, for example, take care of yourself.'' They also highlighted that they ''don't put like practices in the midterms like where we have exams and stuff.''

However, an issue of inclusivity and diversity that was brought up by several participants was the disconnect between the Swedish and international students. Participant I explained this.

> *It's a common problem that, for example, [other faculty], they are hardly approachable, and we don't really have members from there. You don't really know about stuff that is happening here (...) it's easy to reach students from [the more international schools]. But somehow it's harder to get Swedish people to programs. (...) Swedish students tend to go to Swedish events and internationals to English-speaking events''*

Within the predominantly Swedish faculty, the board member experienced similar behaviour: ''We have tried to become more diverse that way as well, but I think also we have realized a little bit that like currently like our operational language is mainly Swedish'' Later on, they also shared that

> *We have like changed like our marketing to be in English, but then there's been discussions regarding like. How much can we? With our current restrictions in our by laws, how much can we change before we are breaking our own by laws? And we have tried to (…) do our operation language in English, but then. I voted through the first time, but actually the second time it was not voted through. So there is some worry there about that it could exclude Swedish students if it's only in English.*

Another faculty also experienced problems with the disconnect between internationals and swedes, and the president of the student union explained that this association implemented measures to fight this. Now they have a

> *recruitment policy where we emphasize on the diversity. For example, now in [the faculty association] they have started with this international declaration, because we saw a tendency for certain committees to only recruit Swedish students, which is obviously not so diverse or inclusive, and now (...) I feel like there's actually some results when it comes to different committees, like for example, [committee] used to exist mainly of Swedish students and now has actually incorporated even students from other schools, but also from a lot of different nationalities*

This is a serious issue because diversity and inclusivity are essential for sustainability, and since the university is very international, extra focus on these topics might be necessary. The president of the student union shared that

this university is one of the only ones in Sweden with so much international students (...) And since that is such a big part of the vision of the whole university, and like the attraction of the overall student population, it is obviously super important that that is reflected in all the student associations and committees as well.

1.2 Environmental Sustainability

When the participants were talking about sustainable behaviour, most examples were given about environmentally sustainable measures. Below, these experiences are sorted in reuse, reduce and recycle.

1.2.1 Reuse

Some associations try to be more sustainable by reusing their materials. For example, the board members often get a personalized sweater when they join. Several boards chose to not have their merch labelled in order to reuse them, Participant F explained that ‘’We don't have that (...) you know, it's for sustainable [reasons] like we just bulk order everything once.’’ They continued that ‘’It's our choice. We can get to pass it on to make it more sustainable, or we can keep it.’’ The boards of Participant J also doesn't have labelled sweaters; ‘’We don't do that. We give it back to the board.’’ Participant B their board was considering the same switch but ultimately feared negative outcomes;

It's a piece of clothing you wear for like maybe one year, and it's every everything is like branded with your own name. (...) if it would not be a personal piece of clothing we could like, give it to the next person and not waste so much clothing. And also like money because they are. Kind of expensive. So we like to talk about (...) some kind of name tag, but I think it would be hard to get people to accept that when they're like, used to having their names printed, and we don't want to make the involved students less motivated, like because that's a much bigger issue, like creating student involvement.

Another aspect in which the reuse mindset is present among the boards is with reusable cups. To encourage the use of reusable cups, Participant I recalled when they

had an end of semester [event] in December, and we served hot chocolate, and to like have less waste like plastic cups and stuff, we asked participants to bring their own mug, and we incorporated a mug competition; the best Christmas mug for the hot chocolate (...) this way we could like reduce the waste of it.

Looking back, Participant I shared ‘’I would say it was like 50% really did bring their mug, but many people just like kind of forgot about it or didn't care.’’ Participant H and their board also want to implement the use of reusable cups, on a structural level. They said their ‘’main priority to fix right now is to swap from one-time use plates and cups into reusable ones because we notice when we have larger events we kind of use a lot of paper cups’’

The effort to reuse materials is also connected to financial sustainability. Participant C acknowledged this; ‘’I know, I feel like when we have budgets, I feel like it forces us to reuse stuff every single year.’’ This ties in to, for example, when Participant B and their board decided to reuse left over kick-off shirts because they ‘’look basically the same, and we don't have to throw away those Shirts’’. Another example is given by Participant F about when they reused excess material from previous years ‘’even though like the dates were wrong, we decided we'll use the same thing again because it's going to be more sustainable that way.’’ Participant I also acknowledged the importance and ease of reusable items;

> *we also try to make like long-lasting decoration elements or things that we can reuse in the future. For example, we invested in fairy lights instead of like other like paper decorations that we have to throw out. Or we use like old boxes to like make some props for the event.*

1.2.2 Reduce

Aside from reusing, the participants also talk about reducing their waste. Especially, several participants talked about reducing the amount of printed posters ‘’We have now switched to less printed Flyers. We used to have a printed flyer for every large event. Right now, we're trying to mostly advertise them online via use of Instagram stories and Instagram posts.’’ Participant I shared. This consideration is not found in all the associations. Participant G admitted that they ‘’printed a lot of flyers and posters. I think I would say like 70 at this point’’ they explained that ‘’Since we don't pay like, since we have our own like association accounts there, we can print as much as we want without being charged of anything. So. We could just print out 100 each week.’’ A common explanation for the use of posters is how they reach more and different people. As Participant G illustrated, ‘’we use mostly do posters because not everyone is looking at Instagram.’’ Paper waste is also reduced by the elimination of tickets as Participant C shared that when their board organizes events, the students ‘’don't have physical tickets anymore because we don't want to buy them, and it's better for the environment to just do it online. So now we have online sales through [an online platform].’’

1.2.3 Recycle

Lastly, a common theme amongst the participants regarding environmental sustainability was that they put effort into recycling. Participant A said, ‘’We always try to like recycle. We always try to not produce waste.’’ Some even have recycling in mind with their purchases. Participant H explained that their board is ‘’buying things which are easier to recycle, even if it takes a bit more finance to do it.’’ However, other participants experienced complications with finding places to recycle. Participant I shared ‘’it's actually hard here on the campus to

find good bins. So like those are too small on the corridor to put all the waste you have after an event.'' Similarly, Participant B also experienced shortages; ''With our trash, we're sorting everything except actually the food, because we don't have any brown bags.''

The student union also has implemented efforts to reduce waste. The president shared

> *We often try to reduce food waste, for example, so that we when we have some sandwich, is leftover. We put like a 50% sticker on it the last hour and we have been investigating the use of like the Karma app or another social to good to go, for example*

1.3 Economic Sustainability

All participants were asked if they felt constrained by their budget, and if they would be more sustainable if they had the means to support it. There was a consensus amongst all the interviewed board members that this is not the case. ''I don't think there was any time where we had something in mind, like, oh, this would be so nice, so sustainable. And then we were like, oh, but this is so expensive we think'' Participant J shared. It seems the associations can finance their sustainable alternatives themselves. Participant F explained that ''even though it's gonna cost a little more, we're gonna do it sustainable way, so, I think, that's not an issue as of now.'' There is also consideration for future financial sustainability, Participant D emphasised this, stating that their board will

> *always plan for long term. For example, if a committee needs something, they would of course like to get it for the cheapest price. But we always have them get the better quality one and use it for long term, and we can help out with the money. That is what we are there for, you know.*

However, sometimes associations still opt for the cheaper options. Participant B talks about when they

> *recently bought a new tent, and we had the option of like, I guess, like a regular tent, but then also we had the option of having a tent with more durable legs (...) So one option is more expensive. (...) but we actually didn't have in our budgets to buy the reinforced ones.*

Because of these financial limitations, and other reasons, they ''decided to have the cheaper option.'' Even though none of the associations felt financially constrained, Participant C did acknowledge that when it comes to food, more money could be beneficial.

> *A lot of the stuff right now, if you go to like ICA or like all the stuff that is more environmental friendly, like the ECO stuff. It's more expensive than the regular stuff as well, so I feel like money could also solve that.*

Combining the economic and environmental sides of sustainability, the participants were asked whether sustainability was considered in their purchasing and procurement processes. Economic sustainability also includes supporting ethical and sustainable businesses. While

the previous section showed there is a level of environmental awareness, the answers to this question acknowledged that it is not yet a central consideration in all their practices. When it comes to their spending, most of the organizational expenses can be traced to three main areas: ovves (student overalls), decorations, and food, particularly fika. Participant B, who is active in a faculty association, explained that sustainability is not intently considered

> *one of our biggest budget posts is buying overalls, and we buy them from a company called Team Star, and it's the same for all associations and union. I have not had a discussion with them regarding sustainability, actually. So. I'm not sure exactly.*

Regarding the typically Swedish fika, most participants admitted it was often purchased from nearby grocery stores without further consideration of origin or environmental impact. Participant J noted, “the projects have some events where they buy fika, there we don't really check where it comes from.”

Despite broader environmental ambitions, these findings indicate that sustainability is not yet fully integrated into purchasing decisions. Several participants admitted this openly. Participant H said that “We unfortunately aren't too sustainable because we use the Rio one-time use plates, but at the same time I don't think it's for now feasible to use reusable plates in Rio.” They continued by stating, “They [Rio] have to provide the food, and we know the amount of the food they use, but we don't really know the sources where they bought it.” Similarly, Participant J emphasized that fika is one of their highest expenditures and that “the only thing we could do is try to get is more sustainable fika, because this is what we spend our money on.”

Providing food for large groups seems to be one of the major challenges to sustainable action. As Participant B put it, “I think the biggest issue there has been to keep it kind of cheap.” They explained further that “how many companies can provide like 1000 meals for let's say the opening ceremony at the kickoff, it's not that many. So then you just take the best option we have.” The unpredictability of attendance at events complicates efforts further. In Participant B’s words

> *But it's also been hard to know beforehand how many will show up. Because last fall we tried to have a sign-up. But then people showed up who had not signed up, and it felt very unfair to not give them any food.*

Still, some exceptions demonstrated an awareness of ethical consumption. When it came to selecting thank-you gifts, participant J mentioned that they made a conscious effort, saying “the products were fair trade, locally produced and, you know, like this. Very basic things that you look at when you want something to be sustainable.” Participant F shared that they had a partnership where, even though sustainability was not a reason for the collaboration, it was present. They described how this company showed ‘’how they limit their carbon footprint, the

emissions and how they compensate back to the environment because of the CO2 emissions, so I think. It's pretty good.''

Overall, as Participant G roughly summarized, “When it comes to buying things regarding the environment. We don't really buy that entirely a lot, except for like grocery items and so on.”

When talking about their budgeting practices and how they approach spending, many shared a common theme: a strong emphasis on being economically responsible and minimizing unnecessary expenses. Participant A described their financial approach plainly, stating, “Of course we have to be smart with our money,” and emphasized that, “we always rate that the budget makes sense, and it's sustainable in the sense that money is well spent and no wasted or something.” Similarly, Participant I echoed this mindset by saying, “We try to minimalize like expenses in a way that we can still achieve a good result.'' Participant G pointed out that when they want to purchase something expensive, which they know will be ‘' a decent chunk in the budget for association, we would naturally look into buying from second hand''

Some participants described specific changes they've made to reduce costs. Participant J highlighted a small yet significant shift in their routine: “We started not ordering coffee from Rio, which is. Really expensive, but we are boiling our own water and stuff and making coffee because it's just as good, and it's, well, cheaper.” Participant B also reflected on how having more money can sometimes encourage wasteful behaviour ‘'in some ways, bigger budgets also promotes being less sustainable. Because like the more money you have, the more you spend.'' To counter this, Participant B suggested, “Maybe we would have to create some kind of like (...) info sheet [about what] we should do [more sustainably] in case if [the association] has more money. But I do think. More money would probably help.” Finally, Participant J outlined a shared sentiment across several interviews when they said, “We try not to buy anything actually, so it's more like about not buying more and trying to reuse what we already have, which is really easy, but then also economically sustainable.”

None of the participants seemed to be worried about their budgets. The associations get their funds from different sources, Participant G is in an interest association, their main source is the sale of patches ‘'the economical aspects, we mostly based on buying patches at all time, well, for most associations, that is that the big income'' Participant D, as part of a faculty association, expressed that they continuously work to increase their capital ‘'We always work with a 10% profit margin.'' Participant F is not very pressed about the budget as they receive money ‘'as associations, we don't have to raise our own funds. I think we get a cut from the university, so I think that's not an issue at all. ‘'

2. Organisational Considerations and Input

This theme focuses on how the boards of the student associations work, how decisions are made and who are considered in these decisions. The following sections will cover four aspects: Board Diversity, Decision-Making Processes, Stakeholders, and Sustainability Policies.

2.1 Board Diversity

To understand how representative and democratic the boards are, the participants were about their formation. The participants explained that in the case of faculty boards, the members are selected by the students through votes in the Biannual meetings. Participant B highlighted that ‘’Indirectly, every student at [the faculty] is involved in our decisions because, like the board has been democratically voted through by them, so when we do take a decision, we are representing the students there.’’ Participant D echoed this mindset, ‘’we've been elected by the students for the students. Yeah, basically we are the representatives of the [faculty] students”. Participant A explains that his means they have no control who is on the board ‘’So we don't have much say in on who is in the board. Right?’’ Still, this doesn’t mean the old board has no influence. Participant B shared their struggle of reaching out to new people to be on their board. This results in the board being formed of mostly the same circles.

> *We want to include more students, but it's hard to reach out (...) often when we recruit people it's like, we encourage people that we talked with yeah, and then it is like mostly our friends because we we try to, like, stand in the lobbies, we try to talk to everyone, but not everyone wants to talk to us.*

To better understand the student boards that represent the students of the university, the participants were asked if they thought their boards were diverse. Participant C acknowledged the importance of diversity as it brings different perspectives. ‘’would definitely say that we're pretty good at keeping the group diverse. And that's good because then we can get opinions from everyone what they think.’’

The participants shared different factors they felt relevant to diversity. Several participants from the interest associations shared how their boards included members from the different faculties. Participant F stated ’’We have students from all four schools.’’ Participants G and H also have multiple faculties present, though they experience that some faculties are more represented than others. Participant G shared ‘’it's diverse when it comes to schools, I’d say right now it is [faculty] predominant.’’ and Participant H counted ‘’three people [from one

faculty], three [another faculty] and one from [third faculty] so we don't have [predominantly Swedish faculty]''

When it comes to the educational background of the board members in the faculty associations, the participants reflected on the amount of programs that are represented in their board. Participant C shared ‘'we always get opinions from every single classroom because (...) It's like 7 people [on the board] they can bring forward their [class'] opinions. So I feel like we get a lot from the people when they are in school.'' Unfortunately not all boards are so spread, Participant B shared ‘'We have from three programs we have like 8 programs schools, so it's not very diverse that way.''

Regarding nationally diverse identities, most of the boards are well represented. Participant F pointed out, ‘'we mainly have internationals as board members.'' Unfortunately there is still one faculty association that struggles with the representation of internationals, their board member shared ‘'Nationality wise we have tried to become more diverse that way as well, but (…) currently like our operational language is mainly Swedish'' They acknowledge ‘'So it's not very diverse that way like everyone is Swedish speaking.''

Looking at the gender and identity presence among the boards, there is some diversity. Participant G shared that ‘'basically have the majority from the board, is actually females. Women'' The same is the case for Participant B, who said this represents their faculty. ‘'[The board is] Representing, kind of, the percentage of the school, like about like 80% girls, 20% boys we are.'' Participant H noticed their board ‘'it's quite evenly split. It's three girls and four boys.''. Additionally, a share of queer representation is acknowledged. Participant F shared ‘'We have someone who identifies as non-binary.'' And Participant H acknowledged, ‘'We have some Board members who are LGBTQ Members.''

Another question asked the participants if they think they and their fellow board members are informed about or interested in sustainability. Their replies varied. Some participants were confident that there is a sustainable mindset in their board. Participant D said ‘'Yes, I do feel so because we really do have to be that way.'' Participant A echoed this, 'Oh yeah, absolutely.'' Other participants were less secure, but still positive. Participant H confessed ‘'I would say most of them are. I cannot say for certain.'' Some participants still see ways sustainability could be more present. Participant F stated 'They are, but including myself. I think we can be more.'' Then some participants acknowledged that sustainability is not very present. Participant G shared that ‘'No, they're probably not aware that we are focused on sustainability, or we even not are, I don't think that's the first thing that we'll think of.''

Participant B explained that since they serve the students, sustainable ideas should also come from them, saying; ‘’I guess maybe we haven't maybe asked them as well as much either, but they also haven't really told us they want us to work with it more.’’

2.2 Decision-Making Processes

The way decisions are being made by the boards was also researched. Internal decisions in the board are democratically made. Participant G argued that democracy is very important, saying ‘’I think it's very democratic, policy needs to be democratic, otherwise it's quite tyrant.’’ Participants all talked about how they vote with a majority to make decisions. Participant A, explained ‘’we always have to have a majority of vote and basically that's how we make decisions.’’ Often, the decision process is very inclusive. B highlighted that Normally we have like an open discussion, and we can usually tell when we have reached consensus’’ they explained that when this is not the case ‘’we need to be more official with this issue. Like OK, who is for it, who is against?’’ The sentiment that inclusive discussions are held before decisions are made is shared by all the participants. The consensus is illustrated by Participant G, who summarized they have a ‘’Very chill discussion, so yeah, like. I think. Yeah. One thing I like is like how everyone's thought is heard (...) They take everyone's voice, so that's nice.’’

Participant I shares their struggles with creating an open environment and getting things done as a leader. They explained ‘’I think it's hard to like manage between being very democratic and being like very like ‘this is what we are going to do’, because people tend to be (...) shy with their opinion’’

The participants were asked if the decisions made on their board about sustainability are made collectively or individually. Most participants shared that the sustainable input comes from the majority. Participant F expressed that it is not a single person's responsibility, saying ‘’I don't think we have like a position, you know, like set apart for that. It's usually we all discuss and just come to a conclusion.’’ Participant J even pointed out that their sustainable mindset is always present, which they experience to be quite complicated, highlighting ‘’And whenever we are doing anything really, we always consider it, of course. It's really, really hard.’’

However Participant I raised the point that having someone responsible for a sustainable perspective could be beneficial, explaining that ’Well, when it comes to sustainability it's important that there is somebody who's like a driver of the whole thing that says, ‘OK, what if would have changed this to this alternative because it's more sustainable.’’ In line with this

perspective, Participant G would assign this to a treasurer because of it connection to spending, they argued ‘’if you look back to any decisions when it comes to sustainability, it is money.’’

2.3 Stakeholders

In some decisions made by the boards, their participants shared that the members have some input. Participant G expressed that the students are asked for their input when it affects them, saying ‘’if it's like big changes that affects our Members, of course we will ask the questions. Do you want this or that?’’ Participant H also explained how the students can share which goods they want to be added to the association's collection, describing ‘’[when] It comes to buying new [materials] because we do a wish list and people initially write [new materials] they wish to see at our shelves, essentially.’’ Participant I experienced similar consideration for its members, sharing that they ‘’For example, we moved [a regular event] because majority couldn't attend at the time. So we try to like adapt the [events] to the members’.’

To see how the students are considered as stakeholders by the boards, the participants were asked about how transparent they are. Participant G recognizes the value of being transparent. They shared, ‘’I believe transparency is one of the most important things you have in a association. Participant H said they have semi casual ways in which they keep their members in the loop. They explained, ‘’We just put it out there.’’ They elaborated that after a change they talk to the students, saying things like “Hope you like it. If there's something wrong with it (...), feel free to give us feedback’ and I think it works out well because It's like open communication. It's not too formal, but it's not really too informal.’’ Another aspect of transparency is highlighted by Participant D, who talked about being transparent about the board's own complications. Participant D shared they are ‘’being very open about our own struggles, too, because I feel like a lot of unexpected things have happened this semester’’

The policies of the boards are open access. This is an essential aspect of transparency. Participant A explained ‘’it is in our I think guidance or policies how the process works, so it's open information.’’ However, according to the participants, still a lot of students are unaware. The particiants explained this by a lack of interest. Participant D said ‘’people need to be willing to listen to us, to actually hear what we would like to communicate in this a lot of information.’’ Participant J reflected, they never posted about it, so the students wouldn’t know. They discussed how they ‘’have never published Any Instagram story or anything,

making about that off. OK, we have this whole meeting, and we are going through the agenda, and we are discussing it and that's how we come up with a decision.''

Even though the students might not be informed about the policies, the participants do not seem worried about this. Participant B explained that their procedures are very predictable, in their words ''Not all students know or how our how our board works. But I I think I think our procedure is kind of standard for how our board operates'' Still, there are initiatives to help inform the students, especially of their own power. Participant C gave an example about how they make sure the students are informed about the Biannual. They elaborated

> *we have, Like, a system that we need to follow that's within our by laws that we need to promote, for example, the biennial meeting 4 weeks before it happens. So everyone knows the date and how to apply and how to send in motions and interpolations and that sort of stuff*

The president of the union also is aware of the lack of student engagement with the policies, they shared ''obviously all our protocols and like documentations are all available on our website. Everything is accessible for students. I do think that not a lot of students are super engaged with it.'' Still, the president highlights that there are interested students who come to get some answers. In their words ''just especially in the last six months, sometimes random student was like, OK, I want to know what's going on [with this or that]. And we're like, yeah, sit down and let's talk about it.'' The president emphasised they would love to make the policies more practical. They said ''there's nothing to hide really (...) I could definitely be open for ways to make it easier for students to understand and engage Because I think that's more the problem.''

Another aspect of treating the students as priority stakeholders is by being open to feedback. Participant G stressed the importance of open communication, sharing that they always ask their members for their opinion. They stated, ''And we always listen to our members if they have any wishes, (…) It's very important to have a mindset of we are members as well'' The Participants shared how they practise open door policies and are always in touch with their students. Participant A highlighted ''we're all like our office is almost always open. So everyone is here to come by for a chat. Then we are always open, I mean.'' Participant B shared that they also go to the students to encourage their input, they explained

> *like we have our lobby days then students can approach us about whatever they think is important (...) especially like before, the biannual meetings is where we tell them like now is your time to like, raise your voice. Like, 'what do you think? your voice matters!'*

A key part of taking feedback is receiving it well, Participant D shared they are very good at that, they said''I feel that we are very, very open to criticism as well. Yeah. And with that we can actually build a better communication system with everybody'' Participant H recognized,

too, that feedback is not a bad thing; they highlighted this with an example where they changed materials after students' comments. Participant H elaborated ‘’the idea which led us to do this [transition to reusable cups] was because of our members how they like in a humorous manner, pointed. ‘’Oh no, how much waste we have left after one event.’’ Participant D also had a change implemented because of the student voices, which caused them to create a sustainability committee. ’The reason about sustainability committee of Us were implemented (...) because students demanded to have a Head of sustainability in our board’’

Several participants shared that another way in which they collect feedback is through feedback forms. For participant J, this is a common occurrence, as they stated ’Hand out a feedback form after every event.’’ Participant C shared that one of their committees also uses feedback forms that ask questions after events, such as ‘’OK, well, what's good about this? What could we do better? What's missing and what do you think about this overall?’’ The next step of this feedback is to consider it, as Participant F explained, they look at the forms and ‘’try to incorporate that into the next activities.’’

The student union also takes feedback, the president explained how they stay in touch with the faculty associations, elaborating

> *one very important forum for us to gather input is called we enumerated astrategic forum where we gather with all the presidents from the different sections [JSA, HALSO, LOK, HI TECH] who also all work full-time. Yeah. Yeah. The project leader and the vice president. So it's the seven of us. And since the student associations presidents are so much more closer to the students, (...) That that is an extremely important forum for us to gather inputs*

The president of the student union also highlighted an example of when they took feedback from the sustainability association to incorporate sustainability deeper into their organization. They shared ‘’the sustainability committee here was lobbying for a new sustainability policy and also to have something more about sustainability in the plan of operations, which then again was also adjusted so that what was in the policy right now’’

The Participants acknowledged both the student union and the university among their prime stakeholders, only after the students.

The Participants who are board members in interest associations recognized that they fall under the restriction of the student union. As Participant G described, ‘’we are underneath the school like also sub-organization associations are under JSU and JSU is under, you know, it's all this hierarchy.’’ Participant H shared that they need permission from the union for specific things, they explained, ‘’we are often in contact with student union because we need to get confirmation from them about certain events and if we need to post and print something, we need their confirmation.’’ Even though the interest associations have to report

back to the union, they do not experience this to be a problem. Participant I highlighted, ‘’We are, I think, pretty flexible. We don't really have a problem with the student union’’

The Faculty Board members have similar sentiments. Participant A described the expectations from the union to be straightforward; they stated to have a ‘’clear understanding of what they want from us, I guess you could say that way, and we have made decisions together in a sense’’ They elaborated that the union is not assuming a higher position. Participant A explained; ‘’we work together as a team with the student Union but nothing else.’’ Participant C highlighted the connection between the union and the faculty associations. They explained that the president of the faculty is working for both, which makes them a good bridge. ‘’ So we have a good dialogue and the President is usually the one that brings forward the opinions that we have or the opinions from the school (...) Then they have like a dialogue. They elaborated further on this connection, sharing that though they might have a lot of leeway, the board ultimately does follow the orders of the union. Participant C described ‘’if they say yeah, you're gonna support us, then we're gonna support them. But obviously, we can bring forward our opinion. Yeah. And we can say, OK, we don't like this. What do you think about this?’’

Of course, the participants also consider the university to be their stakeholder, however, they experience this more indirectly, as the student union serves as a bridge between the students and the university. This point is illustrated by Participant F, who stated, ‘’We operate like right below of student union, so we only concern our things with them.’’

The president of the student union highlighted how valuable the university is as a stakeholder

> *We are here on their facilities, they are a big part of our finances. They make the mandatory membership feasible, for example, kick-off is actually their event, but they delegate it to us.*

Some boards have other stakeholders and partnerships as well. The participant from the sustainability association shared that they considered the planet as their stakeholder. They explained, ‘’whenever we organize an event or do anything, we also think about if it is sustainable for the planet.’’ Some associations are also in contact with companies. Participant G said that they share their income with a stakeholder. They elaborated “We have, I would say we have some stakeholders that reach out to us at times, but our main stakeholders is a production team in one way, (...) which we also share our revenue with.’’ The board of Participant B is also in contact with several partners, they explained they organize a career day and even have several sponsors. In Participant B’s words ‘’Many external companies coming to us, so because we arranged a career day (...) a few of them

sponsor us in other ways as well. For example, standing in lobbies or putting up posters in our schools or want to to be advertised'' Participant I mentioned their board is in the process of creating partnerships. They said ''Now we are trying to reach second hand shops for supplying like elements for our [event] that we would like to use.''

2.4 Sustainability Policies

To see to what level sustainability was present in the boards, the participants were asked if their boards have sustainability policies. At the same time, this question showed whether the participants were aware of the existence of these policies as well as their content.

Several participants admitted that they were not aware of sustainability policies of their association. Participant F explained ''Ah. I'll have to go through that, not sure.'' Similar sentiments were held by Participant I who replied when asked about sustainable policies ''I don't know about it.'' Participant C also wasn't aware,they shared ''Not that I know. I, I wouldn't be surprised if we have, but I'm not that [sure]'' Other Participants were confident in their answer that their associations currently do not have any policies on sustainability. Simply put, Participant G said ''No, we don't.'' Participant B too doesn't have them in their association, they stated 'within [the association] we don't have a sustainability policy, they explained it simply hasn't been brought up by their students, and so its not a part of their plan of operations, elaborating ''It has not been seen as a student question and like we are a student association''

Other participants shared that they do have policies, but that they are limited. Participant A acknowledged a lack of environmental policies but emphasised the presence of their social sustainability policies, describing that ''We have a lot of them [sustainability policies]. I don't think we have environmental policies (...) But we do have a for example, against discrimination and racism and all that in our policies.'' Participant E described that they do have policies about environmental measures, but that they seem to be outdated, saying ''So we have like environmental handbook, but it looks quite old.''

Staying with the topic of sustainability policies, it was also discussed with the participants what their knowledge was about sustainability polices set by the student union and the university. More than half of the participants admitted that they are not aware of these. Participant H said, ''I would say unfortunately I'm not.'' And Participant G echoed this with I am not aware at all.'' Participant E outlined that, though they haven't read them, they know about the policies ''In our [associations] folder, we have both JU policies, and we have JSU policies. So it's very easy to access them.'' Other participants know these policies might

exist, but lack the intention to find out. Participant G explained, ‘’Yes. But I haven't heard anything. When it goes to policies and stuff and that, I could maybe find something. I haven’t searched for it myself.’’ Participant H acknowledged that the lack of knowledge and intent is concerning ‘’many of the board members are unaware of them (…) and that's not a good thing.’’

Diving into the policies of the JSU, Participant F shared that one of their member is part of JSU, therefore, they expect them to provide the perspective from the union, stating “Since she [the president] directly works with the student union, so I assume she is [aware about of the sustainability policies set by the union].’’ Participant H shared that the union is not enforcing their sustainability standpoints, but that they do favour sustainable initiatives. They explained ‘’Student union, I would say, doesn't really enforce sustainability, but they like when we are doing something which is sustainable, and we usually get a confirmation about it faster than something that includes, let's say, providing alcohol’’ Participant J is part of an interest association and are thus operating directly under the union, however, they do not experience the union to be restricting them. They elaborated that ‘’we are under the student union so, but usually no actually like they are kind of very, very flexible, and we have all all like decision-making power.’’ Participant B is part of a faculty board, which means they operate closely with the union, and while they’re aware of the union's sustainability policies, they have also not experienced being limited by the union, as there is no reinforcement. They elaborated

> *So the student union has it in their plan of operations that are kind of that, everything should kind of encompass. And try to be sustainable. UM and. Then there is like a new sustainability policy as well that they have decided, so I'm aware of that, (...) I don't think there's anything in that that requires us to follow their guidelines.*

The interview with the president of the student union provided more insight on what kind of policies they have concerning sustainability. They explained how sustainability is rooted in their union

> *one of our most important steering frameworks is the plan of operations, (…) before it was structured in a way where sustainability was a separate chapter (…) we decided that it shouldn't be a separate chapter because it should be a principle that is applied in all activities*

They elaborated that sustainability is embedded in multiple policies, for example

> *the letter of opinion which indicates what the student union should stand for and this is voted upon by the students. So they say, ‘OK, yeah. For example, the student Unions should strive to this and this and this, and then we have several sustainability goals there as well.’*

The president was asked if they thought that all the interest associations that are under the student union are aware of the union's steering frameworks. They answered,

> *No, I don't think so. I think because the Union consists of a lot of paperwork and like framework (…) it's a lot. And if sometimes I have to check things up. I haven't memorized all of this by myself, either. So, can you imagine how much that is for someone who is not even interested in it to read. So no, I think, yeah.*

The president explained they are going through a transition and ‘’we are still very much in like the setting up a better structure how to inform the students or the interests associations more like collectively.’’ One idea they have is providing support through ‘’like meetings with all the presidents.’’ In addition to that, they shared that the union is also

> *working on like a handbook, which is more. Or less like giving all these interest associations or people that want are are becoming part of that kind of a guide (…) but I'm assuming a sustainability will be part of the handbook as well.*

None of the participants were able to say anything about the sustainability policies of the university, the president of the student union was also asked, and they replied ‘’UM, yeah. I can't refer you right to it, but I'm pretty sure they exist.’’

3. Moving Towards Change

3.1 Complications

After having discussed the current presence of sustainability among the boards, the participants talked about how improvements can be made, as well as what is keeping them. In the previous environmental sustainability section of the empirical data, some complications have already been discussed in the previous empirical data sections. Such as needing to print posters to reach a broader audience, the necessity for food and the convenience of accessibility, and the struggle with finding recycling places. During the interviews, some social struggles came up as well. Participant H mentioned the struggles of joining associations later in the semester. They explained ‘’many people are shy to join associations which like already have communities made’’ Participant I highlighted another way people are excluded, as many events are only posted on Instagram, and not everyone is on there, students miss out. They explained, ‘’If you don't, like follow the association Instagram, just have no idea what's happening there.’’

When the participants were asked what their main struggles and barriers were in becoming more sustainable, there was a clear consensus: the lack of knowledge and time. In the words of Participant J ‘’we lack the knowledge of how to be more sustainable’’ The participant put this issue above financial constraints, as illustrated by Participant F, who said ‘’I don't think

lack of support or lack of funds is what is stopping us from being more sustainable. It's lack of ideas and opportunities". The kind of information and way this is shared is important too, it needs to be accessible. Participant I stated ‘’we need more information, easier information.‘’ Participant I shared the emphasis on clear expectations ‘’some guidance and some clearly shared rules’’ Participant D explained what they require as ‘’we really need a person to be like, yes, this is how it's done if. It matches with your operations implemented.’’ They elaborated they ‘’work a lot and without proper guidance in this question [sustainability], it simply gets lost.’’

One idea brought up by some participants is to organize workshops. Participant A thinks this could be very beneficial. They explained ‘’workshops like you can learn so much, and I feel like once in a while workshop about sustainability. It's needed because we all need to be remembered that’’ Participant D also thinks this is a good idea to introduce the board to practical sustainability. Participant E also sees the gains of training, they highlight a previous training that was beneficial. They shared ‘’maybe education. We just got education in [project] about how we could handle it more and how and where we can find the information’’

Unfortunately not all participants like the idea of a workshop, Participant C underscored how this might be complicated with the time constrains they experience, They explained ‘’I mean a workshop would be great. But then it's also that like how many hours are we going to spend on this and how we're going to make time for that’’. The lack of time is a common issue for the participants. Participant J shared they are very busy, which makes it hard to spend extra time for the sake of sustainability. In their words

> *because it's also a lot of effort, right. And when we have so many events and we have studies next to it, we have internships, we have thesis, work, everything like we are still students, all of us in the board, and we are still studying this. We haven't really dived into to be very sustainable.*

Participant B shared this perspective, saying ‘’we don't have so much time to stop and reflect about [sustainability]. How can we also do this thing?’’ Participant C explained it comes down to the board members themselves and their efforts. They elaborated it is a ‘’matter of how much, like, time people are willing to spend on stuff’’

3.2 Support & Ideas

The participants were asked if they received any support in becoming more sustainable, either from the university, student union or other associations. Participant H shared they received support from the sustainability association. They pointed out ‘’We get some guidance from, got some guidance from [the sustainability association] quite recently. We had

a collaboration just this month, and they were the ones who also pointed out how we could switch from reusable cups or from one-time cups to reusable ones.''

Participant B recalled a project by the union a couple of years ago which aimed to get some kind of sustainability certification, unfortunately this did not work out. Participant B elaborated ''At the Union, the service operations manager, he was also working on some sustainable sustainability questions [to get certified] (...) it was, I guess, too complicated for [the union] to reach all those goals.'' The union proved to be a great source of support for the associations. Participant B explained how the union supports their handover as well as help the associations combine their forces. They said, '' We collaborate a lot more now, now centrally, (...) help each other, so they also have like more knowledge, like gather in one place.'' Participant J also shared their gratitude for the union, and how they can always count on the union for support. As Participant J discussed

> *Like whenever we have something in the board that we are not sure how to handle then we go to JSU like [president] I'm aware that [they have] a lot of experience and [they are] really just open to help and everything.*

The union is also supportive of the initiatives of the sustainability association, their board member shared ''I mean, the university now is financing the menstrual project. The student union was really helpful in achieving this'' Similarly, the union also changed their menu because of the sustainability committee's input. The board member explained ''And also we achieved to have vegans options on campus. I mean, it's still not that much, but at least they have vegan options in their cafeterias.''

Still, several participants were unaware of any specific support given to them to be more sustainable. Participant A shared ''I honestly don't know if that has happened. Still, in general the participants showed openness to the idea of receiving support. Participant B shared this sentiment, saying ''we are always open to more support and like it is a question that we care a lot a lot.'' However, as mentioned before, the support given should be accessible. J explained ''if someone would give us examples like. OK, this is what you can do then I'm sure that we would be open and that we would do it'' The participants emphasised that support should be helping them, and not restricting. Participant I illustrated this point ''It's hard because if you just say, hey, be more, more sustainable, it makes it more difficult for you'' Participant C agrees ''it could be good to have like a, like, a guideline that we try to do this every single time we do stuff, but it doesn't need to be like a strict you can't do this without this.''

To better support the associations, the participants were asked if they already had any ideas that could make them more sustainable. Some of these ideas have already been discussed in the previous section, for example, Participant B, who considered switching from labelled sweaters to name tags, or Participants G and F, who knew they could go more digital. Or Participant H, who, after switching to reusable cups, shared that they can also work towards reusable plates. There are more ideas proposed by the participants. Participant G suggested other associations might be able to cut the transport costs of their members, to be exact, they could do this with a ‘’shuttle service, you know, carpooling being more sustainable to offer that same kind of service.’’ Participant H pointed out that other associations could donate more, they elaborated that ‘’many people underestimate the ability of value can provide by reusing or providing items you use to charities.’’

Participant I had the idea to share more with other associations and reduce the materials they have to procure on their own. ‘’ like I don't know if the student union or something could have like storage with all different kind of stuff that associations can rent for events.’’ They are aware a basic system like this is already in place, but they emphasized its shortcomings

I think that's not that accessible. It would be nice to see like on a website or something like all the elements like just photo. You can rent this screen. You can rent this table, and then it's easier to say, OK, we have an event. On this day we would like to have these, these, these, and then we have to get less things on ourselves

Many participants also had no idea how they could be more sustainable. Participant F shared ‘’we are implementing like whatever we could think of.’’ This touches upon the lack of ideas and information the participants discussed. Participant J suggested that more team building might mitigate this issue. They shared ‘’team buildings for the teams, I think that could help coming up with new ideas’’

Discussion: Data Analysis

The empirical data from the interviews shows that the boards perceive themselves as quite successful when it comes to social sustainability, with the main issue being the disconnect between the Swedish and international students. Environmental sustainability is considered in some aspects but allows for improvement in others. Economic sustainability seems to essentially only be present in the sense of careful spending. Furthermore, the empirical data shows high levels of diversity and democracy. The data shows that students are the first priority of the associations, while they always make sure to be in line with the union. Though there is a high level of transparency, the interviews showed a low level of student engagement with the association's policies. The main challenges to sustainable development identified were a lack of time and a shortage of concrete ideas, rather than financial constraints. Most associations expressed a willingness to improve their sustainability efforts

The following analysis is structured around the three sub-questions that are guiding this research.

How Student Associations Perceive and Prioritize Sustainability

This question will be analysed using the Triple Bottom Line framework, focusing on social, environmental, and economic sustainability. As it provides a comprehensive lens for interpreting how sustainability is understood and practiced by the boards.

Social Sustainability (People)

Student associations strongly value inclusivity and social cohesion. Initiatives like providing vegan food and fostering an open atmosphere are commonly mentioned. However, these efforts are often passive rather than strategic. The associations are open, but, beyond dietary restrictions, no efforts were discussed that worked toward accommodating different needs. Even though there are initiatives that encourage the connection of Swedish and international students, the mindset that overly international approaches might alienate Swedish students highlights that the international mentality is not yet fully embedded in the associations. Most boards are somewhat diverse in terms of gender and nationality, but many do not actively consider how representative they are of the broader JU student population. If this shortage is fixed, it might make the associations more relevant and actually open to all student groups.

Additionally, Mental health remains under-discussed, with discomfort around the topic noted as a barrier. However, very recently, the faculty associations have come together to form EQO, which is a project that takes proactive steps to support individuals who feel left out.

Then there are initiatives like free menstrual products that signal a shift toward addressing equity. Yet these are exceptions rather than the norm, suggesting that broader systemic attention to social sustainability is needed.

Environmental Sustainability (Planet)

Environmentally speaking, Reuse is an adopted practice for the boards, particularly for decorations and clothing. Still many boards have labelled association clothing, this can be seen as a symbolic barrier for sustainability. The value attributed to the pieces can be explained by the emotional attachment they carry, as members might fear losing group cohesion or recognition.

This reflects both ecological awareness and economic practicality. Nonetheless, recycling systems on campus are still perceived as inadequate, as illustrated by the lack of a central recycling point. While some boards actively reduce waste, with for example digital posters, others continue unsustainable practices like balloon use or excessive printing due to convenience or habit.

To be more environmentally sustainable, participants proposed solutions such as centralizing resources, such as rentable equipment, collaborating with second-hand stores, and incentivizing reusable materials, such as cups but also sweaters (if combined with name tags). These ideas show initiative but require support from the union and university to implement, however, since the union is perceived as very supportive, there is space for change here. Overall, environmental sustainability is acknowledged, but practices are inconsistent and often driven more by budget than environmental concerns.

Economic Sustainability (Profit)

Associations are very cautious with spending and strive to use their budgets effectively. However, there is little awareness of ethical or sustainable procurement. Most decisions are made based on cost and convenience, with little consideration for long-term sustainability impacts. Participants noted a lack of options for sustainable sourcing, particularly for branded merchandise (ovves, sweaters or patches) or very large (food) orders, making it hard to choose sustainable options even when desired. External help could be provided to support the associations with finding sustainable alternative vendors.

Furthermore, sustainability is typically seen by the board members as an optional extra rather than a core principle. Without external incentives or guidelines, there is little motivation to adopt more sustainable economic behaviours. This reflects a broader trend: sustainability is valued but not systematically integrated into decision-making.

How Boards Make Decisions and Involve Stakeholders

This question will be analysed using the Stakeholder theory, focusing on stakeholder engagement, transparency and communication, and decision-making processes. It offers a comprehensive perspective for understanding how boards make decisions and who is involved in the process.

Stakeholder Engagement

Students are seen by the board members as the primary stakeholders and are generally well considered. Yet, engagement beyond the association's own members is limited. While elections are democratic, they sometimes have a tendency to remain within social circles, reducing true representativeness. Feedback mechanisms like open-door policies and forms exist, but are rarely used proactively.

In addition, some associations hold events like "lobby days" to be more approachable and collect student opinions and questions, but still, most associations rely on informal or reactive feedback. The view that "students haven't asked for sustainability" suggests a passive approach to engagement. This limits the potential for co-creation and genuine inclusivity in sustainability planning.

However, from the JU and JSU, there is less flexibility in following feedback. The associations fall underneath them and should listen to what they have to say. This authority is never abused; rather, the associations perceive them as supportive, which allows for opportunities in sustainable growth.

Transparency and Communication

Looking at their transparency and communication, the associations mostly reach out to their members and students via Instagram or internal platforms. Despite active posting, some students still miss out on events as they are not active on Instagram. This serves as a barrier to inclusive communication, reinforcing the need for multi-platform strategies or more accessible channels. This barrier is currently being bridged by posters, though this strategy has limited reach.

Additionally, associations report that their policies are completely publicly accessible. However, awareness among members and students is low, even among most of the board members. This raises questions about the effectiveness of transparency and shows that communication strategies require improvement. Furthermore, it also raises concerns about the general effectiveness of the policies, as even those aware of policies don't see them as practical tools, suggesting the need for more actionable or user-centred documents.

Sustainability efforts, when they exist, are not always communicated clearly. Boards focus on event promotion rather than policy explanation, missing opportunities to educate and engage their stakeholders on sustainability goals.

Decision-Making Processes

The interviews made it clear that the boards operate democratically, and participants report that internal decisions are inclusive, and made by a diverse board. However, without a designated sustainability officer, responsibility is diffused. Some recommended assigning sustainability duties to the treasurer or creating a specific role to increase accountability.

It was revealed that leadership dynamics also influence sustainability actions. While decisions are made collectively, strong individual leadership often drives initiatives. This suggests that more structured support, such as training or role-specific responsibilities, could enhance sustainability integration.

The Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development

Challenges

Even though the majority of participants acknowledge that their boards have room to grow more sustainably, the general sentiment is that they are currently functioning in a sufficiently sustainable manner. This perception will keep them from developing more, showing that outside intervention or support is needed to achieve change.

The main barriers to sustainability are a lack of time and a lack of knowledge. Boards are composed of students balancing multiple responsibilities, which limits their capacity to initiate or manage sustainability efforts. Participants expressed a desire for guidance, not restrictions, but supportive tools that could help them act sustainably. The expression of time constrains shows that sustainability is a lower priority, this can be tied to a lower commitment, this commitment can again be explained by a defused responsibility and lack of direct results. If education and information are easy for them to access, and if the board members are fully involved, their view on sustainability might change, along with their priorities.

There is generally a noticeable lack of engagement with sustainability even though the ground work exists. There are policy documents from JU and JSU, but they are often considered inaccessible, overwhelming, and unengaging. Without clear, practical guidelines, boards are unsure where to begin. Sustainability is therefore sidelined, not out of disinterest, but due to uncertainty and limited capacity.

Opportunities

Despite these barriers, there is strong openness to external support. Participants welcomed ideas such as: A sustainability handbook or checklist, centralized resources, such as reusable materials, Campus-wide incentives such as, rewards for reusable mugs, or Team-building workshops focused on sustainability.

And a deeper dive into the interviews revealed even more, based on the participants responses. Other things that could be considered are making the policies and structures of decision-making more accessible by for example social media content or providing a list of ethical and sustainable vendors. Other ideas are a centralized sorting location at campus or to encourage association to reuse the paper of their posters after the events

Additionally, the idea of appointing a sustainability officer within each board was mentioned several times. This could address both the accountability gap and the time constraint by giving one person clear responsibility for researching, implementing, and promoting sustainable practices. However, it could also have adverse effects, removing the sense of responsibility from other board members and making sustainability a component rather than a core value of the association.

Lastly, participants also highlighted peer-to-peer learning as a powerful motivator. Sharing best practices between associations could foster a sense of shared purpose and collective improvement.

Conclusion

The goal of the study is to provide a structured overview of how student associations consider sustainability, support them in becoming more sustainable, and research their decision-making, challenges, and opportunities, focusing specifically on Jönköping University. The findings are based on interviews with 11 board members and use a constructivist approach, exploring perceptions rather than making definitive external assessments. Overall, the findings show that associations perceive themselves as quite successful regarding social sustainability, but environmental and economic sustainability areas allow for significant improvement and seem to be less systematically integrated. The identified barriers are primarily related to a lack of time and concrete knowledge, rather than financial constraints.

A key issue identified is the prevailing disconnect between Swedish and international students, this problem builds upon findings of (Karimi & Matous, 2018) who identified a gap between networks of host-national and international students. Other issues are the persistence of unsustainable habits due to convenience and the lack of (opportunity for) consideration for ethical or sustainable procurement. Generally, a passive approach to sustainability was identified, which was build on the perception of being sufficiently sustainable. These issues are related to low policy awareness among board members. The most significant barriers to sustainable development are the lack of time and concrete knowledge. Because board members juggle multiple responsibilities, they cannot prioritize sustainability. Additionally, the lack of time leave the members without a moment to educate themselves on sustainability, enhancing the lack of knowledge on the topic. This builds on research by (Parry & Metzger, 2023) who illustrate that common obstacles for teachers implementing sustainability education also include a severe lack of training and support, and lack of time. There is a strong openness to external support from the union and the university. There are concrete opportunities suggested by participants, such as developing practical tools like a handbook, checklist, or information sheet. Such practises have already been implemented by other universities (Radboud Green office, 2024; UTwente, n.d.) Other ideas are providing centralized resources, implementing campus-wide incentives, improving policy accessibility, and potentially appointing a sustainability officer, though the diffusion of sustainability should be considered. In addition, workshops were expressed to be a great opportunity for sharing best practices and collective improvement.

Opportunities for improvement

Moving forward requires a shift from sustainability being an optional, budget-driven, or passive consideration to becoming a more systematically integrated core principle. This transition needs external support in the form of accessible resources, practical guidance, and incentives from the university and union to address the identified barriers of time, knowledge, and the perception of sufficiency.

The research shows that decisions are made democratically within the board, with minimal limitations from the union or university. This suggests that changes can be implemented on the level of the boards, and among all board members, for most impact. Changes can also be implemented among the general students, as their voices are important to the boards, and the boards are comprised of students.
The need for information is easier to address than the need for time. Informational sheets can be created, specifically for the associations, providing them with concrete measures to implement, and aspects to consider in becoming more sustainable. This can include a list of sustainable businesses, information on how to bring international and domestic students together, areas of waste reduction and more. This informational material can also include a section highlighting the importance of the associations and the influence they have by exposing their members to sustainable measures and mindsets. Such information can also be provided in videos to increase ease and accessibility. As suggested by the participants, workshops intended to provide sustainable awareness and a sense of responsibility could be implemented as an addition.

Another specific area of improvement would be transforming current policy documents into more engaging, user-friendly, and action-oriented versions, as it could strongly enhance their impact. By simplifying language, providing visual aids or summaries, and clearly linking policy content to specific actions or responsibilities, the university and the union could encourage more awareness, understanding, and ultimately create a stronger incorporation of sustainability measures across student associations. These improvements would support a shift from passive compliance to active engagement with institutional sustainability goals.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it is limited by its qualitative nature and relatively small sample size. The findings are solely based on

interviews with board members of student associations, without triangulation through other methods such as surveys, observations, or document analysis. As a result, the perspectives of regular members or the wider student body are not represented, which narrows the scope of interpretation. The amount of participants limits the generalizability of the results. The views presented may not represent all associations. Moreover, interviewing a single representative per board may not capture the internal diversity of views or power dynamics within each association. Furthermore, the results may have been influenced by selection bias. Though it was emphasised that all participants were welcome in the study. The interviews were on a voluntary basis and therefore participants were those willing to engage in a study about sustainability, potentially skewing the sample toward more sustainability-conscious individuals or associations. This may have led to an over-representation of positive attitudes and openness to change. Additionally, the study used deductive coding, grounded in the Triple Bottom Line and Stakeholder Theory. While these frameworks provided structure and relevance, they may have limited the emergence of insights outside the predefined categories. Also, due to the independent nature of this thesis, double coding or peer validation was not applied, which could affect the reliability of theme development. Next to that, the findings are specific to Jönköping University and its organizational context. As such, generalizability to other universities or cultural settings may be limited. Institutional factors, national policy environments, or different student demographics may yield different outcomes. Lastly, the researcher's positionality as a JU student and partner with SSA could have shaped both the data collection and analysis. While this proximity provided access and contextual understanding, it also introduces subjectivity and potential influence on participant responses.

Future research is recommended to expand the sample size by interviewing multiple members per board or including regular association members to triangulate perspectives. Furthermore, future research address these limitations by incorporating quantitative methods or mixed-methods designs to gain a broader perspective on sustainability engagement within student associations. Studies could include surveys of general student populations, or longitudinal case studies to explore the impact of sustainability interventions over time. There is also a need to examine the role of institutional and structural support mechanisms, such as how universities or national bodies support (or fail to support) grassroots sustainability initiatives. More in-depth qualitative methods such as ethnography could provide richer, embedded insights into association culture, decision-making, and change processes. In particular, exploring the experience of international students, their representation, and their engagement in student governance and sustainability efforts could offer valuable insights for improving inclusivity and integration. Finally, applying additional theoretical frameworks, such

as the behavioural change theory, or the institutional theory, could deepen the analysis and help explain persistent barriers or successful strategies within organizational behaviour.

Ultimately, embedding sustainability more deeply within student associations at JU will require not only structural and policy adjustments, but a cultural shift, one that sees sustainability not as an extra task, but as a shared responsibility and everyday practice.

References

Abiddin, N. Z., Ibrahim, I., & Abdul Aziz, S. A. (2022). Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Their Part towards Sustainable Community Development. *Sustainability*, *14*(8), Article 8. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14084386

Adult education level | OECD. (2022). https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/adult-education-level.html?oecdcontrol-00b22b2429-var3=2022&oecdcontrol-4e20b448f7-var6=TRY

Aleixo, A. M., Leal, S., & Azeiteiro, U. M. (2018). Conceptualization of sustainable higher education institutions, roles, barriers, and challenges for sustainability: An exploratory study in Portugal. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *172*, 1664–1673. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.11.010

Arhin, A. (2016). Advancing post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals in a changing development landscape: Challenges of NGOs in Ghana. *Development in Practice*, *26*(5), 555–568. https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2016.1189513

Banha, F., Flores, A., & Coelho, L. (2022). (PDF) Quantitizing Qualitative Data from Semi-Structured Interviews: A Methodological Contribution in the Context of Public Policy Decision-Making. *ResearchGate*. https://doi.org/10.3390/math10193597

Borges, J. C., Cezarino, L. O., Ferreira, T. C., Sala, O. T. M., Unglaub, D. L., & Caldana, A. C. F. (2017). Student organizations and Communities of Practice: Actions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. *The International Journal of Management Education*, *15*(2, Part B), 172–182. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2017.02.011

Borges, J. C., Ferreira, T. C., Borges de Oliveira, M. S., Macini, N., & Caldana, A. C. F. (2017). Hidden curriculum in student organizations: Learning, practice, socialization and responsible management in a business school. *The International Journal of Management Education*, *15*(2, Part B), 153–161. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2017.03.003

Brett, B. M. (2021). *How Do I Ask Well-Worded Interview Questions?* [Dataset]. SAGE

Publications Ltd.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2005). CONFRONTING THE ETHICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, *18*(2), 157–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/10720530590914789

Brzezicki, M., & Jasiolek, A. (2021). A Survey-Based Study of Students' Expectations vs. Experience of Sustainability Issues in Architectural Education at Wroclaw University of Science and Technology, Poland. *Sustainability*, *13*(19), Article 19. https://doi.org/10.3390/su131910960

Casarejos, F., Frota, M. N., & Gustavson, L. M. (2017). Higher education institutions: A strategy towards sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *18*(7), 995–1017. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-08-2016-0159

Castellanos, M. (2015). Sustaining Latina Student Organizations: An Exploratory Instrumental Case Study | Request PDF. *ResearchGate*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192715592926

Cavoukian, A. (2018). *Privacy by Design The 7 Foundational Principles*.

Christou, O., Manou, D. B., Armenia, S., Franco, E., Blouchoutzi, A., & Papathanasiou, J. (2024). Fostering a Whole-Institution Approach to Sustainability through Systems Thinking: An Analysis of the State-of-the-Art in Sustainability Integration in Higher Education Institutions. *Sustainability*, *16*(6), Article 6. https://doi.org/10.3390/su16062508

Clugston, R. M., & Calder, W. (1999). *Critical Dimensions of Sustainability in Higher Education*.

Davidovitch, N., & Dorot, R. (2023). On the Relationship between a Student Association's Endeavors to Foster a Social–Academic Climate on Campus, Students' Self-Efficacy, and Academic Motivation. *Education Sciences*, *13*(7), 647. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13070647

Douglas, H. (2015). (PDF) Designing Social Entrepreneurship Education. *ResearchGate*. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSEI.2015.072531

Duram, L. A., & Williams, L. L. (2015). *Growing a Student Organic Garden within the Context of University Sustainability Initiatives*.

Elmassah, S., Biltagy, M., & Gamal, D. (2021). Framing the role of higher education in sustainable development: A case study analysis. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *23*(2), 320–355. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-05-2020-0164

Encinas, A. P. (2016). *The Role of Student Associations in providing Community Involvement and Integration between domestic and international students*.

Erguvan, I. D. (2024). What difference does one course make? Assessing the impact of content-based instruction on students' sustainability literacy. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, *11*(1), 708. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03149-4

Fekih Zguir, M., Dubis, S., & Koç, M. (2021). Embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and SDGs values in curriculum: A comparative review on Qatar, Singapore and New Zealand. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *319*, 128534. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.128534

Findler, F., Schönherr, N., Lozano, R., & Stacherl, B. (2019). Assessing the Impacts of Higher Education Institutions on Sustainable Development—An Analysis of Tools and Indicators. *Sustainability*, *11*(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11010059

Freeman, R. E. (2010). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139192675

Gallagher, D., & Gilmore, A. (2013). Social integration and the role of student societies in higher education: An exploratory study in the UK. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, *18*(4), 275–286. https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1472

Henderson, T. S., Michel, J. O., Bryan, A., Canosa, E., Gamalski, C., Jones, K., & Moghtader, J. (2022). An Exploration of the Relationship between Sustainability-Related Involvement and Learning in Higher Education. *Sustainability*, *14*(9), 5506. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14095506

Hudler, K., Dennis, L., DiNella, M., Ford, N., Mendez, J., & Long, J. (2021). Intersectional

sustainability and student activism: A framework for achieving social sustainability on university campuses. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, *16*(1), 78–96. https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197919886860

Jeurissen, R. (2000). John Elkington, Cannibals With Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *23*(2), 229–231. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006129603978

Karimi, F., & Matous, P. (2018). Mapping diversity and inclusion in student societies: A social network perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *88*, 184–194. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.07.001

Kohl, K., Hopkins, C., Barth, M., Michelsen, G., Dlouhá, J., Razak, D. A., Sanusi, Z. A. B., & Toman, I. (2021). A whole-institution approach towards sustainability: A crucial aspect of higher education's individual and collective engagement with the SDGs and beyond. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *23*(2), 218–236. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-10-2020-0398

Krasny, M. E., & Delia, J. (2015). Natural area stewardship as part of campus sustainability. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *106*, 87–96. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.04.019

Law, J. (2004). *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203481141

Lee, B., Liu, K., Warnock, T. S., Kim, M. O., & Skett, S. (2023). Students leading students: A qualitative study exploring a student-led model for engagement with the sustainable development goals. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *24*(3), 535–552. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-02-2022-0037

Lim, W. M. (2025). What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *33*(2), 199–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619

Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., Xenos, M. A., Steel, H., & Burgum, S. (2015). Campus Politics, Student Societies and Social Media. *The Sociological Review*, *63*(4), 820–839. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12220

Menon, S., & Suresh, M. (2022). Development of assessment framework for environmental sustainability in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *23*(7), 1445–1468. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-07-2021-0310

Murray, J. (2018). Student-led action for sustainability in higher education: A literature review. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *19*(6), 1095–1110. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-09-2017-0164

Nwokwu, D. B. N., & Odoh, J. N. (2024). ANALYSIS OF SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN RAISING AWARENESS AND PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES ON CAMPUS AND IN SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES. *Int'l Journal of Education Research and Scientific Development*, *5*(5), Article 5. https://doi.org/10.59795/ijersd.v5i5.180

Parry, S., & Metzger, E. (2023). Barriers to learning for sustainability: A teacher perspective. *Sustainable Earth Reviews*, *6*(1), 2. https://doi.org/10.1186/s42055-022-00050-3

Radboud Green office. (2024, September 17). *Sustainability guide student associations | Radboud University*. https://www.ru.nl/en/students/student-life/for-student-organisations/sustainability-guide

Sommier, M., Wang, Y., & Vasques, A. (2022). Transformative, interdisciplinary and intercultural learning for developing HEI students' sustainability-oriented competences: A case study. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-022-02208-7

Terry, G., & Hayfield, N. (2021). *Essentials of thematic analysis*. American Psychological Association.

UNESCO. (2005). *UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000141629/PDF/141629eng.pdf.multi

United Nations. (n.d.). Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals. *United Nations Sustainable Development*. Retrieved June 1, 2025, from https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/

United Nations. (1992). *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992*. United Nations; United Nations. https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992

United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs*. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

UTwente. (n.d.). *Sustainable Association Guidelines*. Universiteit Twente. Retrieved May 6, 2025, from https://www.utwente.nl/en/sustainability/green-hub-twente/green-guides/

Waheed, B., Khan, F. I., & Veitch, B. (2011). Developing a quantitative tool for sustainability assessment of HEIs. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *12*(4), 355–368. https://doi.org/10.1108/14676371111168278

Weiss, M., Barth, M., Wiek, A., & von Wehrden, H. (2021). Drivers and Barriers of Implementing Sustainability Curricula in Higher Education—Assumptions and Evidence. *Higher Education Studies*, *11*(2), 42–64.

Wolf, P., Harboe, J., Sudbrack Rothbarth, C., Gaudenz, U., Arsan, L., Obrist, C., & van Leeuwen, M. (2021). Non-governmental organisations and universities as transition intermediaries in sustainability transformations building on grassroots initiatives. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, *30*(3), 596–618. https://doi.org/10.1111/caim.12425

Zilahy, G., & Huisingh, D. (2009). The roles of academia in Regional Sustainability Initiatives. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *17*(12), 1057–1066. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2009.03.018

Appendix

Appendix A
Information Sheet Interview

Dear Association,

I hereby invite you to take part in my research study. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is unclear or if you want more information. Take time to decide whether to take part.

I am Mette Heida, a master's student here at JU, and I am currently writing my thesis to receive my degree in global studies. My thesis looks into the current presence of sustainability within the student associations of Jönköping and investigates possible ways of collaborative improvement. This is not an effort to call out associations for lacking sustainable initiatives, rather, this is about finding, together with the associations, ways to be more sustainable. This thesis is in collaboration with the SSA, which means that the results of the study will be both submitted for my thesis, and shared with the SSA and hopefully help them make JU more sustainable.

You have been selected because you are one of the associations of JU, and thereby you are an important part of my research. Taking part in my research involves one of your members agreeing to a one-hour interview about the current measures taken towards sustainability in your association, as well as wishes and obstacles. We will discuss a variety of dimensions of sustainability, including social, economic, and environmental. Additionally, I will ask questions about the stakeholders of your association and its transparency and inclusivity. Lastly, I would like to know about your and JU’s policies on sustainability. The interview will be arranged at a time and location of your preference, within the timeframe of 23/04/2025 to 04/05/2025. The conversation will be audio-recorded to give the most consideration to your answers.

Your consent will be recorded by email or during the audio and can freely be retracted. There are no known physical or psychological risks associated with participating in this study. Still, you are not required to take part. Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to refuse participation at any point. You can refuse any question or withdraw completely.

Your participation in this study will be treated with strict confidentiality. Any information you provide during the interview will be anonymized during transcription. Audio recordings will be securely stored and accessible only to me and my supervisor. Confidentiality may only be broken in exceptional cases where there is a risk of serious harm.

With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. All data will be stored on a secure cloud service. Once I get my degree, the data will be permanently deleted. All data will be treated confidentially and handled following Jönköping University's data protection guidelines and the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). You are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time, or request that it be withdrawn up until the point of anonymization and analysis.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study. If you have any questions or concerns about the interview, please feel free to contact me at heme24zq@student.ju.se

Mette Heida

Appendix B
Consent Form

Consent Form

Study Title: *Current and Future Sustainability Considerations and Efforts within the Student and Interest Associations of the Faculties of Jönköping University*
Researcher: Mette Heida
University: Jönköping University
Supervisor: Radu Dinu

Please read the following statements and be aware that by agreeing to participate in the study, you are agreeing to these statements.

☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

☐ I understand that my responses will be kept confidential and that any quotes used will be fully anonymized.

☐ I permit the interview to be audio-recorded for accurate transcription and analysis.

☐ I understand how the data will be stored, used, and eventually deleted, following data protection policies.

☐ I agree to take part in this study.

Appendix C
Interview Guide

- Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview
- Remember, you can withdraw at any point or skip questions
- I appreciate honesty
- Background: age, course, and student organization

General understanding and attitude

- How would you describe sustainability within your association?
- To what extent is sustainability a priority in your association's planning or mission?

Social Sustainability

- How does your association promote inclusivity and student well-being?
- What efforts do you have to support mental health, community building, or diversity in your events or organization

Environmental Sustainability

- How do you consider environmental impact when organizing events or activities?
- Are there any sustainability measures related to:
    - Food & catering choices?
    - Procurement of materials or merchandise?
    - Transport for events or members?
    - Promotion materials (e.g., printed flyers vs. digital)?
    - Waste management or recycling?
    - Energy use or biodiversity (e.g., outdoor events, venue choice)?

Economic Sustainability

- Do you consider ethical or sustainable practices in fundraising, partnerships, or sponsorships?
- Are there situations where financial constraints limit your ability to act sustainably?

Stakeholders

- Who do you consider your key stakeholders (e.g., students, university staff, sponsors, external organizations)?
- How are stakeholders involved in your sustainability discussions or initiatives?

Transparency

- How does your association communicate its values and actions related to sustainability?

Inclusion

- How are decisions made in your association, and to what extent are diverse voices involved?
- Are sustainability-related decisions made collectively, or by a specific person or role?
- Do you feel your members are informed or interested in sustainability topics?

Policy Alignment

- Are you aware of any sustainability policies or strategies set by Jönköping University or the Student Union?
- Has your association received any guidance, expectations, or support from the university regarding sustainability?
- Does your association have its own written policies, goals, or values related to sustainability? If yes, could you describe them? If not, why do you think that is?
- Would clearer sustainability expectations or support from the university help guide your actions more effectively?

Opportunities

- What opportunities do you see for making your association more sustainable?
- What are the main barriers or challenges you face in doing so?
- What kind of support or resources would help your association act more sustainably?

Closing

- If you could improve one aspect of sustainability in your association, what would it be?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share about your association’s role in promoting sustainability at JU?