ERASMUS+ PROJECT: BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

The Interactive Sustainability Toolkit

The Sustainable Operating System (SOS)

Operationalising Sustainability in European Youth Work

Moving from Symbolic Action to Systemic Transformation

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DASEIN e.V.
Germany
Project Coordinator

Youth Council Next Generation Skopje
North Macedonia
Dissemination & Community Action

Association la Génération de Demain
France
Toolkit Lead Author

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About this Toolkit

How to read it, who it is for, and how much time it takes

Who this toolkit is for

This toolkit is written primarily for four roles inside European youth organisations that work with Erasmus+ funding:

- **Decision-makers:** Members of governing boards and executive directors who set strategic priorities and approve budgets.
- **Practitioners:** Programme leaders, project managers, and trainers who design and deliver youth activities.
- **Coordinators:** Newly appointed sustainability coordinators, focal points, or volunteers tasked with leading the green transition inside the organisation.
- **External readers:** Funders, evaluators, and partner organisations who want to understand the SOS model and assess maturity in others.

How to read it

The toolkit is designed for three reading paths, depending on the time you have and what you need to walk away with.

PATH A — QUICK SCAN

30 minutes

About this Toolkit, Crosswalk page, Voices from the Field, T-Minus 30 Protocol, and one round of the SOS Game. You will leave with a clear picture of what SOS is and what to do in the next 30 days.

PATH B — WORKING READ

2 hours

Chapters 4 (SOS), 5 (Roadmap), 8 (Implementation), and all five Tools. You will leave with enough to draft a Sustainability Action Plan.

PATH C — FULL STUDY

4–5 hours

The entire toolkit linearly, including theoretical chapters and references. The full intellectual case for systemic sustainability and the academic grounding behind every tool.

How this toolkit is different

Many Erasmus+ sustainability resources stop at awareness-raising: posters, infographics, and lists of small green actions. This toolkit goes further. It treats sustainability as an operating system — a set of governance structures, competences, operational routines, and monitoring loops that together make sustainability permanent inside an organisation, regardless of staff turnover. We deliberately move beyond the "Three Pillars" model and beyond Symbolic Action toolkits, anchoring our work in established academic frameworks (Brundtland, GreenComp, RDT, Lewin/PDCA) and current EU policy (European Green Deal, Just Transition, Erasmus+ horizontal priorities).

What you will not find here

You will not find: (1) a list of "50 green tips for your office" — this toolkit is structural, not behavioural-individual; (2) project-management templates for individual mobilities — we address the organisational level; (3) country-specific legal compliance guidance — we point to EU frameworks; national rules require local advice. This toolkit is not a checklist of green actions — it is an architectural blueprint for embedding sustainability into the DNA of a youth organisation.

How this toolkit fits the project

The toolkit is Activity 2 of the Erasmus+ KA210-YOU project "Building Sustainable Communities" (2025–2027). The project has five activities, and the toolkit is designed to feed two of them directly:

- **Community Sustainability Action Programme (Activity 3):** nine hands-on workshops, three per country, on waste, upcycling and air quality (North Macedonia), composting, food waste and greening public spaces (France), and repair cafés, sustainable consumption and renewable energy (Germany). The workshop exercises in this toolkit and the case-study frames in Part IV connect the organisational framework to that field work.
- **Online Sustainability Learning Hub (Activity 4):** the digital home of the toolkit, the SOS Game and the editable versions of Tools 1–5. The Digital Library in the appendices gives the links as QR codes.

Two of the project's three target groups are organisations and the people who run them; the third is young people. The toolkit addresses the first two in its chapters and tools, and the third through the workshop exercises and the game, which are written to be played and facilitated with young people aged 16 and over.

Interactive elements

Four elements make this a toolkit rather than a text:

- **Nine workshop exercises,** one at the end of each chapter, each a 30–90-minute session plan with purpose, group, materials, steps and a concrete output that feeds one of the five Tools.
- **Five printable Tools** (Appendices A–E): the Scope Decision Matrix, the Coordinator job description, the SMART+R Goal Planner, the Implementation Matrix and the Symbolic vs. Substantive Audit.
- **The SOS Game: Twelve Months,** a decision game that plays one year as Sustainability Coordinator in ten minutes, on a phone, online or offline, and ends with a maturity level and the chapters to read next.
- **QR codes** to the game, the reference frameworks and the Erasmus+ platforms, so that the printed toolkit and the digital material stay connected.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Read the chapters to understand the system; run the exercises and play the game to find out where your own organisation actually stands.

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An interactive sustainability toolkit, structured in four parts

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Summary in Four Languages

English · Deutsch · Français · Македонски

Summary

This toolkit proposes a Sustainable Operating System (SOS) for youth organisations: four pillars (Governance, People, Operations, Monitoring), six domains of activity and a four-level maturity model. Its thesis is that sustainability becomes permanent only when it is written into mandates, budgets, procurement rules and reports, not when it appears in posts and posters. Part I sets the conceptual anchors (Brundtland, GreenComp, the European Green Deal, Scope 3). Part II presents the SOS architecture, a six-phase roadmap and the planning mechanics (SMART+R, RACI). Part III covers metrics, implementation and Erasmus+ accountability. Part IV adds partner reflections, case-study frames from the Community Sustainability Action Programme, a 30-day protocol and the SOS Game. Five printable tools close the toolkit.

Zusammenfassung

Dieses Toolkit schlägt ein nachhaltiges Betriebssystem (Sustainable Operating System, SOS) für Jugendorganisationen vor: vier Säulen (Governance, Menschen, Betrieb, Monitoring), sechs Handlungsfelder und ein vierstufiges Reifegradmodell. Die These: Nachhaltigkeit wird erst dann dauerhaft, wenn sie in Mandaten, Budgets, Beschaffungsregeln und Berichten verankert ist, nicht wenn sie in Beiträgen und Plakaten erscheint. Teil I legt die konzeptionellen Grundlagen (Brundtland, GreenComp, Europäischer Grüner Deal, Scope 3). Teil II stellt die SOS-Architektur, einen Fahrplan in sechs Phasen und die Planungsinstrumente (SMART+R, RACI) vor. Teil III behandelt Kennzahlen, Umsetzung und Rechenschaftspflicht im Rahmen von Erasmus+. Teil IV ergänzt Reflexionen der Partner, Fallstudienrahmen aus dem Community Sustainability Action Programme, ein 30-Tage-Protokoll und das SOS-Spiel. Fünf druckbare Werkzeuge schließen das Toolkit ab.

Résumé

Cette boîte à outils propose un système d'exploitation durable (Sustainable Operating System, SOS) pour les organisations de jeunesse : quatre piliers (gouvernance, personnes, opérations, suivi), six domaines d'activité et un modèle de maturité à quatre niveaux. Sa thèse : la durabilité ne devient permanente que lorsqu'elle est inscrite dans les mandats, les budgets, les règles d'achat et les rapports, et non lorsqu'elle apparaît dans des publications et des affiches. La partie I pose les ancrages conceptuels (Brundtland, GreenComp, Pacte vert pour l'Europe, Scope 3). La partie II présente l'architecture SOS, une feuille de route en six phases et les mécanismes de planification (SMART+R, RACI). La partie III traite des indicateurs, de la mise en œuvre et de la redevabilité dans Erasmus+. La partie IV ajoute les réflexions des partenaires, des cadres d'étude de cas issus du Community Sustainability Action Programme, un protocole de 30 jours et le jeu SOS. Cinq outils imprimables complètent l'ensemble.

Резиме

Овој прирачник предлага Одржлив оперативен систем (Sustainable Operating System, SOS) за младински организации: четири столба (управување, луѓе, операции, следење), шест домени на дејствување и модел на зрелост со четири нивоа. Тезата е дека одржливоста станува трајна дури кога е запишана во мандати, буџети, правила за набавки и извештаи, а не кога се појавува во објави и постери. Дел I ги поставува концептуалните основи (Брунтланд, GreenComp, Европскиот зелен договор, Scope 3). Дел II ја претставува архитектурата на SOS, патоказ во шест фази и механизмите за планирање (SMART+R, RACI). Дел III ги опфаќа индикаторите, спроведувањето и отчетноста во Еразмус+. Дел IV додава рефлексии на партнерите, рамки за студии на случај од Community Sustainability Action Programme, протокол од 30 дена и играта SOS. Пет алатки за печатење го заокружуваат прирачникот.

Acronym Index

All abbreviations used in this toolkit, in alphabetical order

We deliberately use a high number of abbreviations because most of them are anchors to established EU frameworks, academic theories, or international standards. Use this index whenever an unfamiliar acronym appears.

Acronym	Full form	Acronym	Full form
BSC	Balanced Scorecard	**NA**	National Agency (Erasmus+)
CSMM	Corporate Sustainability Maturity Model	**NPO/NGO**	Non-Profit / Non-Governmental Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility	**PDCA**	Plan–Do–Check–Act (cycle)
EGD	European Green Deal	**P-P-O**	Planet–People–Organisational viability
EMS	Environmental Management System	**RACI**	Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus	**RDT**	Resource Dependence Theory
EU	European Union	**R-M-S-C-A-C**	Relevant, Measurable, Simple, Comparable, Actionable, Cost-effective
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent	**SAIM**	Sustainability Action Implementation Matrix
GHG	Greenhouse Gas (Protocol)	**SAP**	Sustainability Action Plan
GreenComp	European Sustainability Competence Framework	**SDG**	Sustainable Development Goal
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative	**SMART+R**	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, +Resourced
IOO	Inputs–Outputs–Outcomes (logic chain)	**SOS**	Sustainable Operating System (this toolkit's framework)
ISO	International Organization for Standardization	**SPMS**	Sustainability Performance Measurement System
JRC	Joint Research Centre (European Commission)	**SWOT**	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	**TBL**	Triple Bottom Line
LCA	Life Cycle Assessment	**TCO**	Total Cost of Ownership
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation	**ToC**	Theory of Change
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning	**WCED**	World Commission on Environment and Development

PART I

Foundations

A rigorous framework for understanding sustainability in youth work — moving beyond superficial practices toward systemic transformation.

IN THIS PART

Chapter 1 — Conceptual Architectures. Brundtland, the critique of the Three Pillars, the European Green Deal, GreenComp, and the Symbolic-vs-Substantive distinction.

Chapter 2 — Operational Scope. The four-level maturity model, the GHG Protocol Scopes 1, 2, and 3, and the six organisational domains we will track throughout the toolkit.

Chapter 3 — The Strategic Imperative. The P-P-O framework, Resource Dependence Theory, the three rationales (Planet, People, Viability), and why inaction is the more expensive choice.

Chapter 1 — Conceptual Architectures

What sustainability really means in European youth work

The application of sustainability principles within European youth work requires a precise definition that moves beyond colloquial usage to establish a rigorous ethical and operational framework. Current approaches often suffer from conceptual ambiguity, frustrating attempts at rigorous operationalisation. This chapter sets out the four conceptual anchors we will rely on throughout the toolkit: the Brundtland definition, a critique of the "Three Pillars" model, the European Green Deal, and the GreenComp framework.

1.1 The Philosophical Root: The Brundtland Definition

We anchor our framework in the authoritative definition from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), known as the Brundtland Report (1987).

> "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."
>
> — WCED, Our Common Future (1987)

This is fundamentally an ethical statement rooted in intergenerational and intragenerational equity. For youth work, sustainability is therefore not merely an environmental concept focused on remediation (such as recycling) but a justice imperative. It requires restructuring social systems to ensure equitable access to resources for those yet to be born — and for those alive today who currently lack such access.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Sustainability is not about saving the planet for its own sake; it is about not stealing the future from people who cannot yet defend themselves.

1.2 Critique of the "Three Pillars" Model

The "Three Pillars" model — Social, Economic, and Environmental — is the most widely circulated framework for sustainability. Despite its ubiquity, its academic grounding is notably weak, and youth organisations should treat it with caution.

Historical Ambiguity

Academic reviews reveal no single, accepted point of origin for the three-pillar conception, nor a rigorous theoretical description of the pillars themselves (Purvis, Mao & Robinson, 2019).

Commercial Origins

The model was solidified by John Elkington in Cannibals with Forks (1997) as the "Triple Bottom Line" — a framework designed for business, not for civil society.

Ontological Ambiguity

The framework masks fundamental conflicts, in particular the intrinsic tension between radical ecological demands and the "Profit" imperative.

Implication for Youth Work

Youth organisations should acknowledge this ambiguity and treat the three pillars as illustrative categories rather than as robust theoretical constructs.

🔍 **MICRO-EXAMPLE**

A youth NGO publishes a "Three Pillars" infographic showing equal balance between social, economic,

and environmental goals. In practice, when a flight-heavy mobility project is proposed, the "economic" pillar (covering programme funding) silently overrides the "environmental" pillar (the flight emissions). The model itself does not help resolve the conflict — it only hides it.

1.3 The Policy Mandate: European Green Deal and Just Transition

For European youth work, the abstract philosophical definition must be contextualised by the European Green Deal (EGD), which is the binding policy framework within which all Erasmus+ projects now operate.

- **Systemic Transformation:** The European Green Deal aims to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient economy, decoupling growth from resource use.
- **The Just Transition:** The policy explicitly prioritises the Just Transition — ensuring that the movement toward climate neutrality is socially fair and that no person or region is left behind.
- **Systemic Critique:** This mandate shifts the focus of youth work from superficial ecological practices (tokenism) toward addressing socio-economic system change. It authorises youth workers to engage in profound systemic critique regarding workforce resilience, consumption patterns, and labour-market shifts.

IN ONE SENTENCE

The European Green Deal turns sustainability from a moral preference into a binding policy mandate — and gives youth organisations explicit permission to engage in structural, not just symbolic, change.

1.4 The Pedagogical Shift: GreenComp

To bridge the gap between abstract policy and practical pedagogy, we adopt GreenComp — the European sustainability competence framework developed by the Joint Research Centre (Bianchi, Pisiotis, Cabrera & Punie, 2022). GreenComp moves the conversation from "what to teach" to "how learners should be able to act."

From "What" to "How"

GreenComp transcends the rigid content domains of the "Three Pillars" by defining sustainability as a set of transversal competences — that is, capacities that cross subjects and life domains.

Four Core Competence Areas

- **Embodying Sustainability Values:** Focused on the affective domain and ethical foundations — the values that guide action.
- **Embracing Complexity:** Focused on the cognitive domain — explicitly addressing the need to navigate systemic challenges and conflicting priorities (Systems Thinking, Critical Thinking, Problem Framing).
- **Envisioning Sustainable Futures:** Developing adaptive, forward-looking capacities — futures literacy, adaptability, exploratory thinking.
- **Acting for Sustainability:** Translating learning into collective action — political agency, collective action, individual initiative.

1.5 Substantive vs. Symbolic Action

Drawing on organisational scholarship, we make a distinction that runs through the entire toolkit and reappears in every chapter: the distinction between deep integration and "greenwashing".

Symbolic Action

Communications designed primarily to project an image — for instance, posting about the Sustainable Development Goals on social media — without underlying structural change. This is what scholars call "tokenism" or "greenwashing".

Substantive Action

Measurable actions and actual resource investments into core operations. This means budget lines, staff time, written policies, audited supply chains — not posts, posters, or pledges.

The Culture of Sustainability

Deep integration requires incorporating sustainability not just into isolated projects but into the core operations and programmes of the institution itself.

IN ONE SENTENCE

If your sustainability programme can be measured by the number of social-media posts it produces, it is symbolic; if it can be measured in euros, kilowatt-hours, or signed policies, it is substantive.

Chapter 1 Synthesis: The Conceptual Architecture

Ethical Anchor

We define sustainability through the Brundtland lens of intergenerational justice, not commercial viability.

Pedagogical Method

We reject the transmissive model in favour of the transformative model offered by GreenComp, focused on critical systems thinking.

Policy Alignment

We align with the European Green Deal's mandate for a Just Transition.

Operational Goal

We aim for substantive action, evidenced by advanced metrics rather than by symbolic declarations.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 1 · 45 MIN

Symbolic or substantive? Sorting the last twelve months

Purpose: Make the distinction in Section 1.5 concrete with your own organisation's record.

Group: 4–8 staff, volunteers and youth leaders **Materials:** sticky notes, a wall with two columns

Steps: 1. Each person writes five sustainability-related things the organisation did last year, one per note. 2. Together, sort the notes into Symbolic and Substantive using one test: can it be measured in euros, kilowatt-hours, kilograms or signed documents? 3. Discuss only the notes that caused disagreement; those are where the organisation's self-image is tested. 4. Count the two columns and write the ratio on the wall.

Output: A photo of the wall and the ratio, which becomes the first data point for Tool 5.

Toolkit link: Section 1.5; Tool 5.

Chapter 2 — Operational Scope

Defining the boundaries of sustainable transformation

Many organisations fail to achieve impact not because they lack motivation, but because they lack defined boundaries. This chapter introduces Operational Scope as the strategic blueprint for integration — the formal definition of which organisational domains the sustainability mandate will cover.

2.1 The Strategic Problem: Fragmentation

The "Add-On" Approach

Sustainability initiatives often manifest as highly visible but disconnected activities — occasional clean-ups, eco-themed weeks — that fail to penetrate the underlying systems of governance, finance, or procurement.

Theoretical Consequence

Academic literature confirms that fragmented approaches prevent organisations from maximising societal benefit and limit durable viability.

The Internal Contradiction

Organisations may champion social equity in their public communications while ignoring the high environmental costs in their supply chains and travel patterns — compromising their long-term social mission in the process.

🔍 MICRO-EXAMPLE

A youth NGO runs a successful campaign on climate justice while simultaneously flying participants to four international meetings per year, ordering merchandise from non-traceable suppliers, and using an energy provider whose mix is 70% fossil. The campaign content and the operational reality contradict each other; participants notice; trust erodes.

2.2 Defining Operational Scope

- **Definition:** Operational Scope is formally defined as the set of organisational domains in which sustainability objectives, practices, and indicators will be applied.
- **Prescriptive Nature:** Scope is not merely descriptive; it prescribes the required level of depth and responsibility for monitoring and transformation.
- **Institutional Capital:** A comprehensive scope acts as a signal of organisational legitimacy. For non-profit organisations, disclosing sustainability performance is fundamental for securing funding and maintaining legitimacy with stakeholders.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Operational scope is the contract you sign with yourself: it says which parts of the organisation are inside the sustainability mandate, and which are explicitly outside.

2.3 The Maturity Model

We use a four-level maturity model that runs consistently throughout the toolkit. The same four levels appear in Chapter 4 (SOS Maturity), in the Tools appendix, and in the Crosswalk page. Each level corresponds to a profile in established Corporate Sustainability Maturity Models (CSMM).

Level	Profile	Focus	Typical Status
1 — Emerging	Minimalist	Compliance only; small	Many organisations starting

		operational changes such as recycling.	their journey.
2 — Developing	Pragmatist	Defined roles, initial planning. Sustainability seen as an operational risk to manage.	Common status for Erasmus+ youth organisations today.
3 — Integrated	Strategist	Sustainability institutionalised: trained staff, regular reporting, sustainable procurement, board accountability.	The target state of this toolkit.
4 — Advanced	Systemic Leader	The organisation acts as an external policy driver and community leader, redesigning whole systems.	Few organisations; aspirational.

IN ONE SENTENCE

The honest target for most Erasmus+ youth organisations over the next two to three years is to move from Level 2 (Developing) to Level 3 (Integrated) — not to leap to Level 4.

2.4 Technical Boundaries: The GHG Protocol

To establish credible boundaries, we adopt the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol methodology (WRI & WBCSD, 2004). Non-profits generally use the operational control approach, accounting for 100% of emissions from operations over which they have operational control.

- **Scope 1 (Direct):** Direct emissions from sources owned or controlled by the organisation — for example, gas boilers and organisation-owned vehicles.
- **Scope 2 (Indirect Energy):** Emissions from the generation of purchased electricity used by the organisation.
- **Scope 3 (Value Chain):** All other indirect emissions in the value chain — business travel, purchased goods, supplier emissions, waste disposal.

Critical for Erasmus+ youth organisations

Excluding Scope 3 from your accounting ignores the most substantial environmental impact youth NGOs typically generate — international travel for mobilities and exchanges. A toolkit that quietly excludes Scope 3 is, by design, greenwashing the data.

2.5 The Six-Domain Model

We categorise organisational activity into six distinct domains. These domains are the units on which scope, maturity, and indicators are all measured. Every part of the toolkit can be read as guidance for one or more of these domains.

A — Programming

Educational content and youth activities. The "what we deliver".

B — Internal Operations

Facility management, energy, waste, mobility (Scopes 1 & 2).

C — People & Competences

Staff training, GreenComp alignment, internal capacity.

D — Community

External stakeholder engagement; the organisation as a change agent in the local ecosystem.

E — Resources & Budgeting

Sustainable procurement, Total Cost of Ownership, Scope 3 mitigation through budgeting.

F — Management & Strategy

Executive commitment, board accountability, integration of sustainability into strategy.

2.6 The circular economy as the operational lens

The project that produced this toolkit runs nine community workshops on circular-economy practices: waste management, upcycling and air quality in North Macedonia; composting, food waste and the greening of public spaces in France; repair cafés, sustainable consumption and renewable energy in Germany. In the six-domain model those practices do not sit in one place. They appear three times:

- **Domain A — Programming:** the organisation teaches the practices to young people.
- **Domain B — Internal Operations:** the organisation applies the same practices to its own waste, food, energy and travel.
- **Domain E — Resources & Budgeting:** the organisation buys repairable, refurbished and durable goods, and judges purchases by total cost of ownership rather than price.

The circular-economy test for an organisation is therefore short: does what we teach in workshops appear in our own purchasing and in our own bins? Where it does not, Domain A is ahead of Domains B and E, and the organisation is teaching something it does not yet do.

IN ONE SENTENCE

A repair café in the programme and a disposable-everything buffet in the office are the same organisation contradicting itself in two domains.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 2 · 60 MIN

Draw the boundary: a Scope 3 walk

Purpose: See where the organisation's real footprint sits before deciding what is in scope.

Group: 3–6 people, including whoever books travel and pays invoices **Materials:** flipchart, three colours of marker

Steps: 1. Draw the organisation as a circle. Outside it, list every flow in and out: travel, purchases, food, devices, data, waste, money. 2. Mark each flow Scope 1, 2 or 3. Most youth organisations find almost everything in Scope 3. 3. Circle the three largest flows by volume or cost, and name the domain (A–F) each belongs to. 4. Decide, for each of the six domains, whether it is in or out of scope for the next twelve months, and why.

Output: The "Current Level" column of Tool 1, filled in with reasons.

Toolkit link: Sections 2.4–2.5; Tool 1.

Chapter 3 — The Strategic Imperative

Why sustainability is no longer optional for youth organisations

We now move beyond ethical arguments to establish a strategic imperative. The integration of sustainability is no longer an ancillary option but an essential pillar of organisational governance and operational efficiency. Without a quantifiable rationale, sustainability remains a discretionary activity vulnerable to budget cuts.

IN ONE SENTENCE

If sustainability cannot survive a budget review, it is not yet strategic — it is still hobbyism.

3.1 The P-P-O Framework

We use an adapted Triple Bottom Line framework (Elkington, 1997). We are aware of the critique set out in Section 1.2; here the three categories serve as organising lenses for the rationales below, not as a theoretical model. We deliberately substitute the corporate "Profit" with "Organisational Viability" — because youth NGOs are not in the profit business, but they must remain financially viable to deliver their mission.

Planet (Environmental)

Ecological stewardship and responsible resource use.

People (Social)

Community strengthening, inclusion, and youth wellbeing.

Organisational Viability

Financial prudence, strategic management, and long-term institutional stability — the precondition for any social or environmental impact.

Systemic Unity

These three rationales are intrinsically linked. A deficiency in one inevitably destabilises the others. An organisation that ignores the environment risks losing its EU funding (Viability). One that ignores its staff burnout risks losing the people who deliver the mission (People).

3.2 Resource Dependence Theory

Organisational decision-making is grounded in Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), which holds that organisations are inherently interdependent with their environment.

- **Survival Mechanism:** Organisational survival hinges on the acquisition and safeguarding of critical external resources.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Sustainability acts as a mechanism to align with external priorities (such as EU policy), thereby reducing resource uncertainty and attracting crucial assets like funding and political support.
- **Resilience:** Proactive commitment enhances long-term adaptability against adverse conditions, such as economic downturns, regulatory tightening, or shifts in donor priorities.

🔍 **MICRO-EXAMPLE**

Two youth NGOs apply for the same Erasmus+ KA220 grant. Both run excellent youth-leadership programmes. NGO A has a documented Sustainability Action Plan, a named Coordinator, and a baseline emissions report. NGO B does not. Under the EU Programme Guide horizontal priority on the green

transition, NGO A scores higher and is funded; NGO B is not. The difference is not in the programme — it is in the documented commitment.

3.3 The Three Rationales in Detail

A. Planet — Stewardship and Mission Safeguarding

The environmental rationale extends beyond global mandates to the immediate, local requirements of mission delivery.

- **Programmatic Risk Mitigation:** Youth work relies on safe, accessible local environments. If environmental quality declines through pollution or extreme weather, the organisation's physical assets are compromised and activities may be cancelled.
- **Intergenerational Access:** Protecting ecological systems is synonymous with securing intergenerational access to the resources required for core youth work activities.
- **Operational Duty:** This involves responsible adaptation to increasingly stringent EU green policies and mitigating direct climate risks.

B. People — Inclusion and Civic Competence

The social rationale emphasises the organisation's role in empowering young people with future-relevant skills.

- **The GreenComp Mandate:** We use GreenComp to develop essential competences: systems thinking, critical thinking, and political agency.
- **Civic Engagement:** Research on youth environmental programmes consistently reports a strong association between participation and heightened civic engagement among young people.
- **The Civic Mandate:** The ecological transition is the defining civic challenge of this generation. Formalising sustainability education is the most direct method to cultivate active, socially conscious citizens.

C. Organisational Viability — Resilience and Efficiency

Organisational sustainability dictates long-term viability through strategic resource management.

- **Operational Efficiency:** Optimised resource use (energy, waste) streamlines operations and reduces costs. Investments in energy efficiency yield substantial savings, freeing capital for mission-critical programmes.
- **RDT Application:** Organisations that demonstrably commit to sustainability attract stronger political connections and are viewed more favourably by resource providers, stabilising the operational environment.
- **Insurance Policy:** This internal stability acts as a long-term insurance policy against operational failure during external shocks (energy-price spikes, donor withdrawal, regulatory shifts).

3.4 The Erasmus+ Funding Reality

- **Alignment with EU Priorities:** The European Green Deal and EU Youth Strategy place the green transition at the forefront. Alignment secures political legitimacy.
- **Funding Competitiveness:** The Erasmus+ Programme Guide explicitly mandates that fighting climate change is a horizontal priority. Priority is given to projects that support the organisation's planned approaches to environmental sustainability.
- **Causal Prerequisite:** Demonstrable strategic commitment is increasingly a prerequisite for funding success in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.

3.5 The Cost of Not Acting

- **Financial Risk:** Rising operational costs (energy, waste) and reduced competitiveness in EU grant streams.
- **Compliance Risk:** The EU regulatory landscape is transitioning from voluntary to mandatory (for example, Directive (EU) 2024/825 on empowering consumers for the green transition, which from September 2026 prohibits generic, unsubstantiated environmental claims). Organisations currently treating sustainability as optional face future systemic shocks and potential sanctions.
- **Reputational Risk:** Accusations of greenwashing weaken stakeholder trust, leading to volunteer withdrawal and loss of partnerships.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Inaction is no longer cost-neutral: every year of delay raises the financial, regulatory, and reputational cost of eventually catching up.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 3 · 30 MIN

The budget-review stress test

Purpose: Test whether the sustainability agenda would survive a real cut, and build the arguments before it is needed.

Group: 3 roles: treasurer, chair, coordinator; the rest observe **Materials:** the current budget, Section 3.3 open

Steps: 1. Announce a 15% cut for next year. The treasurer proposes which sustainability-related lines to remove. 2. The coordinator defends each line with one of the three rationales (Planet, People, Organisational Viability) and one number. 3. The chair decides. Observers note which arguments worked and which were only moral appeals. 4. Swap roles once and repeat with a different line.

Output: A list of sustainability budget lines, each with its "survival argument" written in one sentence.

Toolkit link: Sections 3.1–3.5.

PART II

The SOS Framework

From ad-hoc projects to a Sustainable Operating System — the architecture, the roadmap, and the planning mechanics.

IN THIS PART

Chapter 4 — The SOS Architecture. The four cyclical Pillars (Governance, People, Operations, Monitoring) and the four-level Maturity Model.

Crosswalk Page. A single-page mapping of how the six Domains, the four Pillars, and the four Maturity Levels relate to one another.

Chapter 5 — The Strategic Roadmap. Six implementation phases, grounded in Lewin's change model and the PDCA cycle.

Chapter 6 — Strategic Planning Mechanics. SMART+R goal-setting, KPI selection, the RACI matrix, risk assessment, and EU horizontal-priority alignment.

Chapter 4 — The SOS Architecture

From hero management to system management

We now establish the architectural blueprint for institutionalising sustainability. This framework — the Sustainable Operating System — is the central proposition of the entire toolkit. It is derived from and extends the work of the earlier Erasmus+ project "Green Youth Employability" (Toolkit on Green Soft Skills).

The paradigm shift

We move from "ad-hoc projects" to a "Sustainable Operating System". Reliance on isolated activities produces efforts that are inconsistent, unmeasurable, and ultimately symbolic.

Why structure, not heroism

Structural organisation is the engine that makes sustainability permanent. It defends the organisation against the risk of staff turnover by replacing "hero management" — where the whole agenda depends on one motivated person — with "system management".

IN ONE SENTENCE

If the Sustainability Coordinator quits tomorrow and the agenda dies, you do not have a system; you have a hero.

4.1 The Four Cyclical Pillars

The SOS is defined by four interdependent building blocks, structured as an active, cyclical process rather than as static categories.

Pillar 1

Governance & Leadership

Ensures sustainability is a strategic priority. The "mandate".

Pillar 2

Competences & People

Drives the system through training and GreenComp alignment. The "engine".

Pillar 3

Operations & Resources

Connects internal routines (energy, procurement, mobility) with goals. The "action".

Pillar 4

Monitoring & Improvement

Tracks progress and ensures accountability. The "feedback loop".

The feedback loop

The system is iterative: data from Monitoring (Pillar 4) directly informs Governance (Pillar 1) for the next cycle of strategic adjustments. Without this loop, the SOS becomes a one-off project; with it, the SOS becomes self-correcting.

4.2 Pillar 1 — Governance & Leadership (The Mandate)

Governance ensures that sustainability transcends optional activities and becomes a core strategic priority.

- **Strategic priority:** Implementation requires the formal appointment of a Sustainability Coordinator to ensure internal coordination.
- **Resource allocation:** Governance is the critical link that fiscally connects the budget to the mission. Without dedicated financial and human capital, operational changes (Pillar 3) inevitably stall.
- **Policy integration:** Sustainability must be integrated into annual strategy and long-term planning, solidifying the mandate.

🔍 **MICRO-EXAMPLE**

A youth NGO appoints a "Sustainability Coordinator" but assigns the role to an unpaid intern with no budget authority and no seat at programme-planning meetings. Six months later, no measurable change has occurred. The role exists on the website; it does not exist in the operating system.

4.3 Pillar 2 — Competences & People (The Engine)

This pillar serves as the mechanism for cultural transmission, converting leadership mandates into actionable capacity.

- **GreenComp alignment:** Training is explicitly aligned with the European GreenComp framework, focusing in particular on Systems Thinking and Collective Action.
- **Dual training requirement:** Organisations must ensure that staff understand sustainability principles AND that young participants gain green competences. Addressing only one of these creates a knowledge gap that undermines credibility.
- **Behaviour change:** Training supports the translation of theory into routine practical changes, essential for transitioning from planning (Level 2) to integrated practice (Level 3).

4.4 Pillar 3 — Operations & Resources (The Action)

Operations represent the intersection where strategic intent meets measurable environmental performance.

- **Operational integrity:** This pillar transforms daily behaviours (energy use, waste, mobility patterns) so they reflect sustainability goals.
- **Sustainable procurement:** Sustainable procurement is a non-negotiable marker for Level 3 status. It signifies that organisational spending aligns with the mission.
- **Digital sustainability:** We include digital operations (data storage, device lifecycle, cloud choices) as a critical environmental footprint component, moving beyond traditional physical waste concerns.

4.5 Pillar 4 — Monitoring & Improvement (The Accountability)

Monitoring closes the systemic loop, providing evidence for refinement and external accountability.

- **Measurability:** The establishment of rigorous indicators counters the risk of sustainability efforts being symbolic rather than impactful.
- **Feedback mechanisms:** The annual sustainability report fulfils a dual function: demonstrating accountability to stakeholders and providing data to inform the next cycle of strategic planning (Pillar 1).

- **Maturity:** Achieving Level 3 (Integrated) requires regular reporting cycles, moving beyond ad-hoc data collection.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Pillar 4 is the eyes of the system: without monitoring, the other three pillars are invisible to the people who fund, govern, and learn from them.

4.6 The SOS Maturity Model

We use a four-level maturity model to benchmark organisational progress. This is the SAME four-level model introduced in Chapter 2 — used consistently across this toolkit to avoid confusion.

Level	Name	What it looks like in practice
1	**Emerging**	Basic awareness, small operational changes (recycling bins). Absence of structured policy, named role, or budget line.
2	**Developing**	Structure emerges; defined roles and initial planning. This is the common status for most Erasmus+ youth organisations today.
3	**Integrated**	The target state of this toolkit. Sustainability is fully institutionalised: trained staff, regular reporting, sustainable procurement, board-level accountability.
4	**Advanced**	The organisation acts as an external policy driver and community leader, redesigning whole systems beyond its own perimeter.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Be honest about your starting level. Most Erasmus+ youth organisations are at Level 2 — not Level 3 — regardless of what their websites say.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 4 · 40 MIN

Hero or system? The bus test

Purpose: Find out how much of the sustainability agenda depends on one person.

Group: 4–8 people, the Board invited **Materials:** four sheets, one per pillar

Steps: 1. For each pillar (Governance, People, Operations, Monitoring), ask: if the person who knows most about this left tomorrow, what would stop within a month? 2. Score each pillar 0 (everything stops) to 3 (nothing stops; it is written down and someone else owns it). 3. Write next to each pillar the one document or routine that would raise the score by one point. 4. The lowest-scoring pillar becomes the first priority of the SOS.

Output: A pillar fragility map and one concrete fix per pillar.

Toolkit link: Chapter 4; Tool 2.

Crosswalk: How the Frameworks Connect

A single page that maps Domains, Pillars, and Maturity Levels onto each other

This toolkit uses three lenses to view organisational sustainability: the Six Domains (Chapter 2), the Four Pillars of the SOS (Chapter 4), and the Four Maturity Levels (Chapters 2 and 4). These are not three competing systems — they are three views of the same reality. This page shows how they map onto each other so you can move between them without confusion.

How to read this table

- Each row corresponds to one of the Six Domains of organisational activity.
- The "Primary Pillar" column shows which of the four SOS Pillars takes the lead for that domain.
- The "Level 2 looks like..." and "Level 3 looks like..." columns describe what maturity in that domain means in concrete, observable terms.

Domain	Primary Pillar	Level 2 (Developing)	Level 3 (Integrated)
A — Programming	**Pillar 2 (People)**	A few green-themed activities per year; topics raised in some workshops.	GreenComp competences embedded across all youth programmes; learning outcomes tracked.
B — Internal Operations	**Pillar 3 (Operations)**	Recycling in place; some energy-saving habits; no measurement.	Energy and waste KPIs tracked annually; renewable electricity contract; documented mobility policy.
C — People & Competences	**Pillar 2 (People)**	One staff training session on sustainability; informal commitment.	All staff trained against GreenComp; competences in job descriptions and annual reviews.
D — Community	**Pillar 1 (Governance)**	Occasional partner events; no documented stakeholder map.	Annual stakeholder dialogue; documented partnerships with local sustainability actors; co-created action.
E — Resources & Budgeting	**Pillar 3 (Operations)**	Cost-based purchasing; sustainability mentioned only for some items.	Sustainable procurement policy with TCO analysis; ring-fenced "green budget" line; supply-chain criteria applied.
F — Management & Strategy	**Pillar 1 (Governance)**	Sustainability mentioned in strategy; named coordinator without authority.	Board-approved Sustainability Action Plan; coordinator with budget; annual sustainability report published.

IN ONE SENTENCE

When you fill in Tool 1 (Scope Decision Matrix) at the back of this toolkit, you are answering this crosswalk for your own organisation, one domain at a time.

Chapter 5 — The Strategic Roadmap

Six phases for moving from intention to embedded practice

5.1 The implementation gap

There is a well-documented disparity between ethical motivation and systemic transformation. Non-strategic change management often results in isolated, short-lived projects that fail to modify the core operating culture. The SOS Strategic Roadmap addresses this gap by providing a logical sequence of development — a clear path from a baseline position to sustainable excellence.

5.2 Theoretical foundation

The roadmap synthesises two dominant models of organisational change to manage both cultural shifts and process refinements.

- **Lewin's model — Unfreeze:** Phases 1–2 are the "unfreeze" stage (Lewin, 1947): breaking existing mindsets and establishing the necessity for transformation.
- **Lewin's model — Change:** Phases 3–5 are the "change" stage: active development of new behaviours and formalising governance.
- **Lewin's model — Refreeze:** Phase 6 is the "refreeze" stage: embedding new practices into operational norms to ensure permanence.
- **PDCA cycle:** The PDCA cycle (Plan, Do, Check, Act; Deming, 1986) validates the iterative nature of the roadmap. Phase 6 feeds back into Phase 1; the system never stops cycling.

PHASE 1 Comprehensive Baseline Assessment

We establish the foundation for planning through rigorous data collection. Without a credible baseline, all subsequent measurement is speculative.

- **Objective:** Acquire quantitative and qualitative data detailing the organisation's current position across all six domains.
- **Methodological rigour:** The assessment must prioritise repeatable data-collection protocols. If the baseline is inconsistent, future monitoring (Phase 6) becomes unreliable.
- **EMS principles:** We adopt ISO 14001 principles (ISO, 2015), requiring the identification of all activities with significant environmental impact, including those currently unregulated.

🔍 MICRO-EXAMPLE

Before declaring "we will reduce emissions by 30% in three years," a youth NGO spends one week measuring its actual baseline: kWh from electricity bills, kilometres flown last year per staff member, kilograms of paper procured. Only with that baseline can the 30% target be more than wishful thinking.

PHASE 2 Strategic Scope and Materiality

This phase defines the boundaries of the change initiative to prevent resource overextension. Trying to act on all domains at once is the surest way to act on none.

- **Delimitation:** Use tools like SWOT analysis to define specific boundaries. Decide which level (Emerging, Developing, Integrated, or Advanced) is realistic to target across each domain.
- **Precautionary principle:** Prioritise initiatives that mitigate potentially catastrophic risks (planetary boundaries) even without scientific certainty.
- **Capabilities approach:** Prioritise initiatives that promote social justice and human well-being alongside environmental protection.

PHASE 3 Governance and Policy Alignment

We transform sustainability from an optional activity into a strategic imperative.

- **Governance mandate:** The Board must actively approve the strategic framework to reduce resource-dependence risks.
- **EU policy alignment:** Goals must explicitly align with the European Green Deal (Just Transition) and the EU Youth Strategy.
- **Strategic security:** This alignment is not merely symbolic. It safeguards resources by maximising eligibility for key funding streams (Erasmus+, ESF+, the Just Transition Mechanism).

PHASE 4 Planning and Prioritisation

This phase builds the detailed Sustainability Action Plan (SAP).

- **The SAP blueprint:** A document detailing goals, measurable indicators, timelines, and responsible owners.
- **Digital strategy:** The plan must integrate digitalisation strategies to enhance efficiency and resilience against external shocks.
- **Behaviour modification:** The plan must define key behaviours and outline mechanisms to modify the structure of rewards and consequences.

PHASE 5 Execution and Deployment

The transition from planning to daily practice across the SOS pillars.

- **Systemic deployment:** Execution must occur across Governance, People, Operations, and Monitoring simultaneously. Partial deployment leads to systemic failure.
- **Stakeholder enrolment:** Implementation requires ongoing dialogue so individuals understand WHY specific behaviours are expected. Compliance without comprehension does not last.
- **Capacity building:** Continuous skills enhancement for youth workers is required to ensure effective impact.

PHASE 6 Monitoring and Improvement

The final step in the cycle ensures accountability and continuous improvement — and feeds the next cycle. The PDCA logic means Phase 6 is not the end — it is the moment when Phase 1 begins again, with new and better data.

- **Feedback loops:** Institutionalising systematic feedback to adjust actions based on objective performance data.
- **Credible reporting:** We advocate adopting Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards (GRI, 2021).
- **Trust building:** Utilising standardised frameworks enhances transparency, bolstering confidence among critical stakeholders and grant agencies.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 5 · 90 MIN

Baseline in a box

Purpose: Produce the Phase 1 baseline with what the organisation already has, in one sitting.

Group: 2–4 people with access to bills, travel records and the last event's logistics **Materials:** one shared spreadsheet, the last twelve months of electricity bills, travel claims, the procurement list above

€150

Steps: 1. Enter twelve months of electricity in kWh and the cost. 2. Enter staff and participant travel by mode: kilometres by air, rail, bus, car. 3. Estimate the waste of the last large event in kilograms or bin bags, and the share of reusable items. 4. Enter training hours delivered and the list of purchases above €150 with their lifespan. 5. Mark every number you had to estimate; those are next year's measurement tasks.

Output: A one-page baseline with five numbers that will appear, unchanged, in next year's report.

Toolkit link: Chapter 5, Phase 1; Section 7.6; Tool 1.

Chapter 6 — Strategic Planning Mechanics

The tools and disciplines that turn intent into deliverables

Strategic planning for sustainability is no longer ancillary; it is mandatory for mission fulfilment and Erasmus+ funding eligibility. This chapter equips you with the planning mechanics — the tools that distinguish a credible plan from a vague aspiration.

IN ONE SENTENCE

A sustainability plan that does not allocate money, people, and deadlines is a wish list, not a plan.

6.1 The Erasmus+ mandate on green transition

- **Horizontal priority:** The Erasmus+ Programme elevates sustainability to a core horizontal priority in project selection.
- **Selection criteria:** Priority is given to projects that develop competencies in green sectors and demonstrate how their objectives address organisational sustainability challenges.
- **Strategic necessity:** A strategic plan must explicitly align long-term goals with the EU green-transition mandate to meet quality-assessment criteria and secure funding.

6.2 Foundational lenses: systems thinking and actor mapping

- **Systems thinking:** Move away from linear solutions to identify interventions that mitigate systemic risks and leverage dynamic interdependencies.
- **Actor mapping:** Unlike traditional stakeholder analysis, actor mapping explores the relationships among actors to improve system performance.
- **Multiplier effect:** A systemic approach helps the plan identify leverage points for comprehensive change while mitigating negative feedback loops (for example, solving waste while creating supply-chain issues).

6.3 Stakeholder engagement and documentation

- **Mapping needs:** Identifying the needs, interests, and concerns of affected parties is the necessary building block for establishing effective working relationships.
- **Inclusive governance:** Engagement must involve continuous two-way participation, ensuring input genuinely informs decision-making.
- **EU requirement:** EU policy demands systematic documentation of all meetings (participant lists, action points) to foster transparency and ensure records are accessible for the project lifecycle.

6.4 Proactive risk assessment

- **Strategic question:** Planners must ask: "What risks could prevent us from achieving our outlined objectives?"
- **Methodology:** Risks must be mapped directly to each goal, keeping them top of mind during implementation.
- **Scope:** Assessments should range from comprehensive internal evaluations to systematic checklists covering different risk types.

6.5 The SMART+R framework

We adopt an enhanced goal-setting model to address the resource constraints typical of non-profits.

Critique of SMART

Standard SMART goals often fail to distinguish between outputs and outcomes and can lead to "tunnel vision" — staff hit targets but miss the point.

The "+R" addition

We explicitly add Resourced to the criteria. Validating that a goal is resourced (staff time, budget) is non-negotiable to prevent role overload and burnout.

🔍 MICRO-EXAMPLE

A goal stated as "Train all staff in GreenComp by December" looks SMART. But if no training budget is allocated and no staff hours are protected, the goal will silently fail by November and the Coordinator will be blamed. Adding the +R discipline forces the question — €X allocated, Y hours per week per person — at the moment of goal-setting, when it is still possible to fix.

6.6 Operationalising sustainability: KPIs and the P-P-O lens

To transition from values to verifiable improvement, organisations must select Key Performance Indicators.

- **Global standards:** We use the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework to facilitate comparable and credible reporting across the Triple Bottom Line.
- **Environmental KPIs:** Metrics tracking resource footprint (kWh, waste in kg) and the adoption of sustainable transport modes.
- **Social KPIs:** Metrics quantifying inclusion, diversity, and active youth participation in governance.
- **Organisational KPIs:** Indicators evaluating financial resilience (income diversity, reserve months) and supply-chain accountability.

6.7 Implementation and accountability: the RACI matrix

- **RACI matrix:** The standard tool for defining ownership: Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed.
- **Ownership:** Establishing the "Accountable" individual on every action holds final authority, ensuring expectations are clear and that no task can be silently dropped.
- **MEL mandate:** Continuous Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning is mandated by Erasmus+ Quality Standards. The process must adhere to the principle of active youth participation in reflection and documentation.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Without RACI, every task is co-owned by everyone — which means it is owned by no one.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 6 · 45 MIN

SMART+R or nothing

Purpose: Apply the +R test to goals that already exist, and cut or resource them on the spot.

Group: the people who wrote the current plan **Materials:** the current action plan, three copies of Tool 3

Steps: 1. Take the three sustainability goals from the current plan that matter most. 2. Run each through the seven questions of Tool 3, out loud, with one person recording. 3. Any goal that fails +R (no budget line, no hours, no Accountable person) is rewritten with those three elements or struck out. 4. Assign the RACI "A" for each surviving goal before the session ends.

Output: Three resourced goals with an Accountable owner each, or fewer goals and an honest plan.

Toolkit link: Section 6.5; Tool 3.

PART III

Measurement & Delivery

Metrics, implementation, and monitoring — turning the SOS architecture into measurable, accountable practice.

IN THIS PART

Chapter 7 — Metrics. The IOO logic chain, contribution analysis, the R-M-S-C-A-C principles for indicators, and the four indicator groups.

Chapter 8 — Implementation. Implementation pillar-by-pillar, the SAIM tool, and behavioural strategies for institutionalisation.

Chapter 9 — Monitoring & Accountability. EU reporting requirements, the digital audit trail, GreenComp and SDG alignment, and citation standards.

Chapter 7 — Metrics

From invisible aspiration to actionable management

Metrics transform sustainability from an abstract aspiration into a systemic management practice.

> "You cannot improve what you cannot measure."
>
> — Management aphorism (often attributed to Peter Drucker)

- **The maxim:** Without metrics, progress remains invisible — to staff, to the Board, and to funders.
- **Accountability:** Monitoring provides crucial assurance to external stakeholders (funders, the public) that resources are being used efficiently.
- **Demand generation:** Effective M&E generates internal demand for data. Valued findings lead to performance improvements, reinforcing the long-term sustainability of the system itself.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Metrics are not bureaucracy — they are the only language in which strategic ambition becomes credible.

7.1 The Input–Output–Outcome (IOO) framework

We use the standard IOO logic chain to categorise measurement at three different levels of depth.

Level	What it measures	Example
Inputs	Resources used (budget, volunteer hours, materials).	€2,000 allocated; 80 volunteer hours.
Outputs	Immediate activities delivered (number of workshops, number of participants reached).	12 workshops delivered; 240 young people attended.
Outcomes	Specific changes or results brought about by the activity.	34% reduction in staff air travel; +18% improvement in youth GreenComp scores on pre/post test.

Strategic shift

Funders increasingly demand evidence of OUTCOMES rather than just outputs. "We trained 240 participants" is an output; "240 participants improved their GreenComp scores by an average of 18%" is an outcome. Reports that stop at outputs are scored lower in Erasmus+ assessments.

7.2 Contribution versus attribution

Measuring social change presents a methodological challenge that we should be honest about.

- **The attribution trap:** Attempting to prove that an intervention was the SOLE cause of an outcome is often impossible in complex social ecosystems. Many factors push in the same direction.
- **Contribution analysis:** The practical alternative (Mayne, 2008). This approach uses Theory of Change to assess HOW the organisation helped cause the outcome, alongside other factors.

- **Validity:** This framework allows non-profits to honestly assess their role in shared social impact without overreaching.

🔍 MICRO-EXAMPLE

After three years of GreenComp programming, a youth NGO sees increased local turnout for climate-policy consultations. They cannot honestly claim sole credit (a national campaign and a school curriculum reform also happened). Contribution analysis lets them honestly say: "Our programming was one of three documented contributing factors, with these specific pathways..."

7.3 Principles for good indicators (R-M-S-C-A-C)

We use six criteria, aligned with EU evaluation principles, to ensure rigour and pragmatism in our indicator selection.

R — Relevant Direct connection to strategic goals and Erasmus+ priorities.	**M — Measurable** Data is objectively detectable using available resources.	**S — Simple** Understandable to non-expert staff and volunteers.
C — Comparable Consistent methodology over time, enabling trend analysis.	**A — Actionable** Data guides management decisions and acts as an early-warning system.	**C — Cost-effective** Complexity must be proportionate to value; avoid "indigestible detail".

7.4 Indicators across the four groups

Group 1 — Environmental (Planet)

- **Energy & Resources:** Tracking electricity consumption (kWh) and relative performance (% reduction year-on-year).
- **Waste:** Measuring inputs and outputs (kg of waste produced) and procurement alignment with sustainability criteria.
- **Mobility:** Total kilometres travelled per mode (air, rail, bus); share of mobilities using "Green Travel" top-ups.

Group 2 — Social (People)

- **Youth participation:** Tracking scale and inclusion: percentage of disadvantaged groups represented in programmes — a key EU priority.
- **Community engagement:** Quantifying partnerships and event participation.

Group 3 — Organisational (Viability)

- **Governance:** Tracking policy adoption — for example, the number of green policies ratified by the Board.
- **Operations:** Monitoring internal resource management — for example, the percentage of procurement that meets sustainability criteria.

Group 4 — Learning & Behaviour (Competence)

- **Green skills:** Differentiating between general sustainability competences (values and attitudes) and specific technical skills.
- **Mixed methods:** Using surveys and reflective journals to capture the full spectrum of GreenComp development.

7.5 Mixed-methods data collection

Effective monitoring combines quantitative reliability with qualitative richness.

- **Quantitative methods:** Meter readings, weight measurements, participation counts. Essential for efficiency metrics.
- **Qualitative methods:** Focus groups, interviews, observations. These capture context and the "why" behind the numbers.
- **Actionable insight:** Qualitative data interprets quantitative results — for example, explaining why a waste reduction occurred — making the indicator truly actionable.

7.6 Baselines and targets

- **Baseline (where we start):** The initial measurement, taken before any initiative. A robust baseline is the prerequisite for measuring progress.
- **Target (where we want to go):** Targets must adhere to SMART criteria — and to the +R discipline introduced in Chapter 6.
- **Achievability:** Without a baseline (current energy use, for example), setting a target ("50% reduction") is speculative and risks demotivating staff when they cannot tell whether they are succeeding.

IN ONE SENTENCE

A target without a baseline is a slogan; a target with a baseline is a contract.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 7 · 40 MIN

From output to outcome

Purpose: Learn to write the sentence a funder actually scores.

Group: 3–6 people who write reports **Materials:** the last Erasmus+ or annual report

Steps: 1. Copy five sentences from the report that describe sustainability results. 2. Classify each as input, output or outcome using the table in Section 7.1. 3. Rewrite every output as an outcome: a change, measured against a baseline, with the measure named. 4. Where no baseline exists, write the sentence anyway and mark the baseline as a task for Exercise 5.

Output: Five outcome sentences ready for the next report, and the list of missing baselines.

Toolkit link: Sections 7.1–7.2.

Chapter 8 — Implementation

From plans to embedded routines

8.1 The execution challenge: the "installation" trap

We address the critical failure point at which ambitious plans meet operational reality.

- **The gap:** Many organisations experience implementation failure because their transformation remains superficial.
- **Installation vs. implementation:** We must overcome the risk of achieving merely an "installation" — placing new bins, hanging a poster — without the sustained results that require structural culture shifts.
- **Root causes:** Implementation failures typically stem from unclear responsibilities, static operations, and the disconnection of sustainability from daily routines.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Buying bins is an installation; changing what people put in them is implementation.

8.2 The three dimensions of implementation

Successful adoption must be managed across three distinct phases, operationalising Lewin's change model.

Deployment (Change)

The initial launch of activities and visible infrastructure changes. Focus is on generating momentum.

Integration (Refreeze)

Embedding new requirements into formal systems (Standard Operating Procedures). This locks the change in place, preventing reversion to old habits.

Alignment (Cohesion)

The end state where staff behaviour, internal policies, and youth programmes mutually reinforce the mission, eliminating contradictions.

8.3 Implementation by pillar

Pillar 1 — Governance: activation and policy instrumentation

- **Resource allocation:** Leadership must allocate dedicated budget and human resources. This signals that sustainability is a core priority, not a discretionary activity.
- **Policy instrumentation:** Adoption of Sustainability Assessment Checklists as formal ex-ante reviews for new projects, partnerships, and major purchases.
- **Conflict presentation:** Decision tools must mandate the identification of trade-offs between economic and environmental objectives BEFORE new projects are adopted.

Pillar 2 — People: capacity building and GreenComp integration

- **The coach approach:** Training should guide staff toward internal motivation rather than simply enforcing compliance.
- **GreenComp integration:** Youth activities must cultivate competence across all four GreenComp areas: Embodying Values, Embracing Complexity (Systems Thinking), Envisioning Futures, and Acting for Sustainability.

- **Cultural intelligence:** Training empowers staff to identify when operational practices contradict the strategic mission, reinforcing alignment.

Pillar 3 — Operations: the nexus of integration

- **Sustainable procurement:** A vital systemic lever. We use Total Cost of Ownership analysis, accounting for the full lifecycle costs (purchase + maintenance + disposal) rather than only the initial price.
- **Digital sustainability:** Acknowledging the hidden footprint. Policies must address Hardware Lifecycle Management (e-waste) and Data Optimisation (cloud and storage choices).
- **Systemic consistency:** Failure to embed sustainability into capital-intensive areas indicates a systemic failure of alignment — the strategy is not yet real.

🔍 MICRO-EXAMPLE

A youth NGO discovers that switching from one cloud provider to another with verified renewable energy reduces its digital Scope 3 emissions by an estimated 40%, at zero additional cost. The decision is made in Pillar 3, but it required Pillar 2 (someone trained to ask the right questions) and Pillar 1 (a procurement policy that allows sustainability criteria to override marginal cost differences).

Pillar 4 — Monitoring: performance measurement systems

- **SPMS:** Adoption of a Sustainability Performance Measurement System to capture the complexity of the triple bottom line.
- **Balanced Scorecard:** Adapting the Balanced Scorecard for NGOs to assess Financial Stewardship, Beneficiary Focus, and Organisational Capacity simultaneously.
- **Data-driven allocation:** Performance measurement drives resource allocation by identifying which integrated processes are yielding the greatest impact — and which should be discontinued.

8.4 The Sustainability Action Implementation Matrix (SAIM)

We operationalise the action plan using the Sustainability Action Implementation Matrix. This tool — provided in full in Tool 4 of the appendix — forces the identification of resources and mitigation strategies for every action, before it begins.

- **Action steps:** Detailed breakdown of the task.
- **Resources needed:** Budget, training modules, tools.
- **Potential barriers:** Anticipating resistance — for example, "cost concerns from finance".
- **Mitigation solutions:** Pre-planned responses — for example, "use TCO analysis to reframe the cost question".

To overcome human resistance and lock in new routines, the SAIM is paired with three behavioural strategies — antecedent interventions (simplified systems and visual cues), social norms (peer influence), and commitment devices (written pledges). You cannot lecture an organisation into sustainability — but you can design the environment so the sustainable choice becomes the easiest choice.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 8 · 45 MIN

The procurement replay

Purpose: Replay recent purchases with total cost of ownership and derive the rule you need.

Group: whoever buys things, plus one sceptic **Materials:** invoices for the last three purchases above

€150

Steps: 1. For each purchase, add to the price: expected maintenance, energy use over its life, and disposal. Note whether a repairable, refurbished or shared alternative existed. 2. Compare the total cost of what was bought with the total cost of the alternative. 3. Decide the threshold above which the comparison becomes compulsory, and who signs. 4. Write the rule in five lines and add it as a row in Tool 4 with an owner and a deadline.

Output: A draft green procurement rule and one completed row of Tool 4.

Toolkit link: Section 8.3, Pillar 3; Section 2.6; Tool 4.

Chapter 9 — Monitoring & Accountability

Reporting, auditing, and meeting EU compliance standards

9.1 The regulatory imperative

Accountability within Erasmus+ is mandatory and multifaceted, encompassing strict administrative compliance and thematic alignment.

- **Compliance foundation:** Monitoring rests on adherence to statutory reporting procedures and the effective use of centralised EU digital tools.
- **Thematic alignment:** Projects must demonstrate alignment with overarching EU political priorities, particularly sustainability and inclusion.
- **Financial gatekeeping:** Submission of the Final Report is a formal precondition for receiving the final payment. Failure to comply risks reduction or recovery of the grant and damages future eligibility.

9.2 Mandatory reporting structures and timelines

- **Progress reports:** KA210 small-scale partnerships have no standard interim report; the National Agency (NA) may request a progress report at a point defined in the grant agreement. Larger KA220 cooperation partnerships submit a progress report at the project midpoint.
- **The Final Report:** Must be submitted within 60 days following the project end date, as set in the grant agreement. Internal deadlines should be set earlier to allow for quality checks and proofreading.
- **Participant reports (KA1 only):** In learning-mobility projects (KA1), participants submit an EU Survey participant report within 30 days of the end of the mobility, and coordinators monitor submission rates. KA2 partnerships have no participant reports: participant feedback is collected through the organisation's own M&E system (Chapter 7).

9.3 Digital audit trails

The Beneficiary Module (which replaced Mobility Tool+ for the 2021–2027 programme) is the primary mechanism for operational oversight and must be treated as a continuous reporting module.

- **Continuous input:** The continuous reporting module is perpetually open. Data should be entered as milestones occur, not only at deadlines.
- **Audit trail:** The module records activities, participants, and results against the approved application and generates the structure of the final report, maintaining a robust audit trail of all activities.
- **Transparency:** Reliance on this standardised digital trail links local execution to central EU oversight, fulfilling the transparency and visibility obligations set out in the grant agreement and the Erasmus+ Programme Guide.

9.4 Aligning reporting with the European Green Deal

- **Strategic focus:** Priority is given to initiatives that develop competencies in green sectors and support environmental sustainability.
- **Impact assessment:** The narrative final report must move beyond activity listing to quantify specific efforts to save resources and lower carbon footprints.
- **Policy delivery:** The grant functions as a direct mechanism for delivering the European Green Deal. Reporting must prove this contribution, not merely assert it.

9.5 Measurement frameworks: GreenComp and SDGs

- **GreenComp:** The mandatory reference model. M&E metrics must capture the extent to which GreenComp competences (such as Systems Thinking) are mainstreamed and assessed.
- **SDGs:** Provide global context (United Nations, 2015). Reporting should align with SDGs relevant to youth (Quality Education, Climate Action, Reduced Inequalities) to demonstrate contribution to global efforts.
- **Comparative value:** Using EU-approved terminology ensures project results are reportable at the macro-policy level.

9.6 Designing a mixed-methods M&E system

- **Quantitative data:** Collected via pre/post surveys to measure changes in individual functioning (resilience, environmental perception). Answers "what happened".
- **Qualitative data:** Collected via interviews and focus groups to capture the "why". Essential for transforming statistics into compelling stories of impact, in line with the EU Youth Strategy's call for evidence-based youth policy.
- **Learning culture:** M&E should serve as a catalyst for organisational learning, not just for compliance reporting.

9.7 Internal auditing and ESG performance

- **Internal audit:** Governance requires independent oversight of financial and regulatory compliance to mitigate reputational risk.
- **Environmental compliance audits:** Specialised audits to assess the organisation's own environmental performance (for example, ISO 14001 alignment).
- **Holistic consistency:** Internal practices (procurement, energy, mobility) must be consistent with the GreenComp competences being taught to participants. Inconsistency is the operational definition of greenwashing.

9.8 Documentation and citation standards

To achieve professional standards, reporting must adhere to EU interinstitutional rules.

- **Plain language:** Prioritise short, simple words ("use" instead of "utilise"; "show" instead of "demonstrate") to maintain clarity within strict word limits.
- **Citation rules:** Cite EU legal acts with their full reference (Regulation type, number, and Official Journal citation). Use full author lists rather than "et al." in academic citations where space allows.
- **Credibility:** Adherence to recognised EU style guides validates technical credibility and signals a serious partner organisation.

IN ONE SENTENCE

A perfectly executed sustainability programme reported in vague language scores lower than a modest one reported with rigour, exact numbers, and proper citations.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 9 · 45 MIN

The evaluator's chair

Purpose: Experience the final report from the side of the person who scores it.

Group: 4–8 people; one plays the National Agency evaluator **Materials:** the draft sustainability section

of a report, Tool 5

Steps: 1. The evaluator reads the draft section once, silently, with Tool 5 open. 2. The team presents the section in three minutes. The evaluator may interrupt only with one word: "Evidence?" 3. Every claim that cannot be backed with a number, a document or a named source is listed on the wall. 4. The evaluator scores the section with Tool 5 and explains the score in two sentences.

Output: The list of claims to replace with evidence before submission.

Toolkit link: Sections 9.4 and 9.8; Tool 5.

PART IV

Practice

Partner reflections, case-study frames from the Community Sustainability Action Programme, the binary choice every organisation faces, the 30-day protocol, and the SOS Game.

IN THIS PART

Voices from the Field. Partner reflections from DASEIN e.V., Youth Council Next Generation Skopje, and Association la Génération de Demain on the editorial process.

From the Field. Case-study frames for the nine community workshops in Skopje, Mérignac and Berlin, to be completed from the workshop documentation.

Conclusion: The Binary Choice. Symbolic vs. Substantive — the unavoidable trajectory every organisation now faces.

T-Minus 30 Protocol. Three governance actions for the next 30 days: formalise the mandate, assign the role with real authority, establish the baseline.

The SOS Game. Twelve Months: one year of decisions as Sustainability Coordinator, with a maturity level and reading recommendations at the end.

Voices from the Field

Partner reflections — what working through the SOS framework looked like in practice

What follows is not three formal case studies. It is three short reflections from the partner organisations that built this toolkit together: DASEIN e.V. in Germany, Youth Council Next Generation Skopje in North Macedonia, and Association la Génération de Demain in France. The aim is not to claim that any partner has fully implemented the SOS — none has — but to share, plainly, the ways the framework intersected with each partner's own context during the project.

A note on these reflections

Erasmus+ partnerships are made up of organisations of different sizes, languages, legal forms, and operating contexts. The text below is deliberately modest. We do not claim measurable outcomes that we have not yet earned. We share, instead, the questions the framework forced each of us to ask.

GERMANY

DASEIN e.V.

Project coordinator and lead applicant

As coordinator of the partnership, DASEIN e.V. carried responsibility for project administration, financial management, and consortium leadership. The SOS framework was first encountered not as something to apply internally, but as an editorial object: how do we make it coherent, how do we make it usable for partners of very different sizes, how do we keep the language honest.

What the framework surfaced was a question that any coordinating organisation has to face honestly: the gap between what a partnership produces in its outputs and what its operating practice looks like day to day. The four pillars — Governance, People, Operations, Monitoring — proved useful precisely because they cut across that gap. Talking about the four pillars was easier than talking about whether internal practice matched programmatic message.

The most uncomfortable section of the toolkit, during editorial review, was Section 1.5 on symbolic versus substantive action. It is uncomfortable because it applies to everyone, including the people writing it.

NORTH MACEDONIA

Youth Council Next Generation Skopje

Dissemination and community-level field action

Youth Council Next Generation Skopje is the most experienced partner in the consortium, operating in North Macedonia, a third country associated to the Erasmus+ Programme. Its role in the partnership covers the toolkit activity, community-level field action in Skopje and dissemination across the Western Balkans region. Working through the SOS framework from this position raised a tension worth naming openly: the framework, like most sustainability frameworks, was originally written assuming an EU-context organisation, and the language sometimes drifted in that direction.

The honest contribution from this partner was to push back, repeatedly, when the language drifted toward assumptions that fit only certain operating contexts. Several passages in the toolkit — including

the Tools 1, 2, and 3 templates and the explicit acknowledgement that maturity Level 2 is not a failure but a realistic starting point — exist in their current form because of that pushback.

Field experience does not always translate cleanly into the categories that frameworks like to use. The honest path is to recognise that translation as work in itself, and to do it deliberately. The toolkit reflects that recognition on every page that mentions the four-level maturity model.

FRANCE

Association la Génération de Demain

Lead author of the toolkit

Association la Génération de Demain led the conceptual framework, the SOS architecture, and the editorial process. The toolkit is, in its current form, an artefact of that editorial work. The choice to anchor the toolkit in Brundtland, GreenComp, the European Green Deal, and Resource Dependence Theory — rather than in the more familiar "Three Pillars" — was made deliberately, and it was contested in early drafts before being accepted.

The slogan that emerged during the editorial process was "what we teach, we live." It is intentionally a high standard. It was kept in the conclusion because abandoning it would have made the rest of the text easier to write — and that ease is exactly what the toolkit is arguing against.

Authoring a toolkit is not the same as having implemented it. The author and the partnership recognise this openly. The toolkit is a proposal grounded in the literature and refined through partner consultation; it is not a record of finished work.

Shared observations from the partnership

Across the three partners, a small number of observations recurred during the project. They are recorded here without claims of measurable result, because the work is ongoing.

- **Clarity through contradiction:** Every conversation that produced clarity began by naming a contradiction — between message and practice, between intention and budget, between size and ambition.
- **Authority before activity:** In every discussion, the question of authority — who can decide, who controls budget, who has a seat at which table — proved more decisive than the question of activity. Symbolic roles produce symbolic results.
- **Same problem, different versions:** Organisations of different sizes, contexts, and operating histories face different versions of the same problem, not different problems. The four pillars and six domains held up across that range; the maturity model is what allowed each partner to be honest about its starting point.
- **The honest sentence:** The most useful sentence in the editorial process was "we are not yet at Level 3 here." Every time someone said it, planning got more realistic.

IN ONE SENTENCE

This toolkit is a proposal from a partnership in motion, not a report from a partnership that has finished the work.

From the Field: The Community Sustainability Action Programme

Case-study frames for the nine community workshops, to be completed from the workshop documentation

Activity 3 of the project, led by Association la Génération de Demain and running from 1 March to 31 October 2026, delivers nine hands-on workshops of two to four hours, three in each partner country, in schools, community centres and public spaces. Each workshop combines a short theoretical input with practical work on a circular-economy topic chosen for the local context, and is facilitated by youth workers with local experts, businesses and municipal services.

The frames below are the toolkit's own case-study format. They are deliberately short and deliberately demanding: one row for the baseline, one for the outcome, one for what changed in the organisation, and one for what remained symbolic. They are completed from the workshop reports, photographs and participant feedback collected during the programme, and published in the version of the toolkit hosted on the Learning Hub. An empty "Outcome measured" row is itself a finding.

HOW TO COMPLETE A FRAME

Use the workshop report and the sign-in sheets for the first four rows. Use the scale, the meter or the pre/post self-assessment for the two measurement rows. Write the last three rows with the Board, not for the Board. If a number is estimated, say so; if it was not measured, write "not measured" and add it to next year's baseline tasks (Exercise 5).

North Macedonia — Skopje

Lead organisation	Youth Council Next Generation Skopje
Planned focus (application)	Pollution-focused workshops: waste management, air-quality improvement, upcycling.
Workshops delivered	[number] of 3 planned · dates · venues (schools, community centres, public spaces)
Participants	[number] young people · [number] with fewer opportunities · [number] youth workers and facilitators
Baseline measured	[e.g. kg of waste at the first session; kWh; km travelled; GreenComp self-assessment before]
Outcome measured	[e.g. kg diverted or repaired; % reduction; GreenComp self-assessment after; participants continuing after the workshop]
Substantive change in the organisation	[what changed in Domains B, E or F as a result: a policy, a supplier, a budget line]
What remained symbolic	[honest note: what was visible but did not change a routine]
Local partners	[municipality, schools, businesses involved] · tool library or recycling operator, if any
SOS domains touched	A (programming) · D (community) · [B / E / F if changed]

France — Mérignac (Bordeaux area)

Lead organisation	Association la Génération de Demain
Planned focus (application)	Urban sustainability: composting, food-waste reduction, greening public spaces.
Workshops delivered	[number] of 3 planned · dates · venues (schools, community centres, public spaces)
Participants	[number] young people · [number] with fewer opportunities · [number] youth workers and facilitators
Baseline measured	[e.g. kg of waste at the first session; kWh; km travelled; GreenComp self-assessment before]
Outcome measured	[e.g. kg diverted or repaired; % reduction; GreenComp self-assessment after; participants continuing after the workshop]
Substantive change in the organisation	[what changed in Domains B, E or F as a result: a policy, a supplier, a budget line]
What remained symbolic	[honest note: what was visible but did not change a routine]
Local partners	[municipality, schools, businesses involved] · municipal green-space or composting service, if any
SOS domains touched	A (programming) · D (community) · [B / E / F if changed]

Germany — Berlin

Lead organisation	DASEIN e.V.
Planned focus (application)	Circular economy: repair cafés, sustainable consumption, renewable-energy awareness.
Workshops delivered	[number] of 3 planned · dates · venues (schools, community centres, public spaces)
Participants	[number] young people · [number] with fewer opportunities · [number] youth workers and facilitators
Baseline measured	[e.g. kg of waste at the first session; kWh; km travelled; GreenComp self-assessment before]
Outcome measured	[e.g. kg diverted or repaired; % reduction; GreenComp self-assessment after; participants continuing after the workshop]
Substantive change in the organisation	[what changed in Domains B, E or F as a result: a policy, a supplier, a budget line]
What remained symbolic	[honest note: what was visible but did not change a routine]
Local partners	[municipality, schools, businesses involved] · repair-café network or energy cooperative, if any
SOS domains touched	A (programming) · D (community) · [B / E / F if changed]

IN ONE SENTENCE

The frames turn nine workshops into evidence: without the baseline and outcome rows, the

programme is an output; with them, it is an outcome the final report can prove.

Conclusion: The Binary Choice

The end of the cognitive phase; the beginning of the operational phase

The arc of the toolkit

We have traversed the complete arc of institutional sustainability.

- **The ethical anchor:** We began by redefining sustainability not as an ecological chore but as an Intergenerational Justice imperative rooted in the Brundtland definition.
- **The structural solution:** We moved beyond the "Three Pillars" to the Sustainable Operating System (SOS) — a cyclical architecture designed to replace "hero management" with systemic resilience.
- **The measurement:** We transitioned from invisible good intentions to actionable metrics (R-M-S-C-A-C, IOO, contribution analysis, mixed methods) that ensure values are backed by data.

The "analysis paralysis" risk

Academic literature warns of the implementation gap — a state in which organisations possess high theoretical knowledge (GreenComp, frameworks, terminology) but low operational capability.

- **The trap:** It is comfortable to remain in the "planning" phase, drafting endless strategies without changing procurement, governance, or KPIs.
- **The pivot:** This toolkit marks the end of the cognitive phase. The operational phase must begin immediately, this quarter, in your organisation.
- **The mandate:** We declare "enough thinking." The focus shifts now from acquiring competence to demonstrating performance.

The binary choice

As you leave this text, your organisation faces a binary trajectory.

Path A — Symbolic (Greenwashing)

You continue with visible, low-effort actions: social-media posts, recycling bins, eco-themed weeks. You ignore the systemic footprint — Scope 3 travel, supply chain, procurement, board accountability. This is greenwashing. It is comfortable. It is also increasingly punished by funders, regulators, and your own staff.

Path B — Substantive (Justice)

You undertake the difficult work of formalising the Sustainability Coordinator role with real authority, auditing your supply chain, and allocating a ring-fenced budget. You accept short-term friction in exchange for long-term institutional alignment. This is transformation. It is harder. It is also what the next decade of EU funding will reward.

IN ONE SENTENCE

There is no neutral position; doing nothing is a choice, and it is increasingly the more expensive choice.

T-Minus 30 Protocol

Three governance actions to be executed within 30 days

To prevent inertia after reading this toolkit, the Board or Executive Director must execute three governance actions within 30 days. These three steps cost almost nothing and unblock everything else.

STEP 1 — DAYS 1–7

Formalise the mandate

Pass a Board Resolution adopting the SOS Architecture (Chapter 4) as official organisational policy. The resolution should name the four Pillars, commit to the four-level Maturity model, and authorise the appointment of a Sustainability Coordinator.

STEP 2 — DAYS 8–21

Assign the role

Appoint the Sustainability Coordinator using the job description in Tool 2. The role must include: budget signing authority above an agreed threshold; a seat at the Management Committee or equivalent; a minimum protected time (commonly 30–60% of a full-time post for medium organisations, 10–20% for small ones). A system without an owner does not exist.

STEP 3 — DAYS 22–30

Establish the baseline

Commission the Phase 1 Assessment (Chapter 5). Even a minimal version — last year's electricity, last year's travel kilometres, headcount, budget — generates the first verifiable data points. Without a baseline, every later target is a slogan.

Final statement: the infinite game

Sustainability is not a project with a completion date; it is an operating system.

- **Iterative logic:** We adopt the PDCA cycle (Plan, Do, Check, Act). The first iteration will be imperfect. This is acceptable; inaction is not.
- **The ultimate metric:** Success is not defined by the perfection of the plan, but by the institutionalisation of the practice.

The directive: The planning phase is concluded. The execution phase begins now.

"The best way to predict the future is to create it."

— attributed to Peter Drucker

The SOS Game: Twelve Months

One year as Sustainability Coordinator, played in ten minutes, on any phone, online or offline

The game puts the reader in the role the toolkit describes. The player is appointed Sustainability Coordinator of "Horizon Youth", a fictional youth association with six staff and volunteers, a rented office, a small youth centre, four international activities a year, a discretionary reserve of €4,200, and no baseline data. Each month brings one situation and three ways to respond. The game does not say which response is symbolic, substantive or systemic until the choice is made.

How the game maps to the toolkit

- **Six domain meters (A–F)** rise and fall with every decision, exactly as in the Crosswalk and Tool 1. The average gives the maturity level, 1 to 4.
- **Symbolic, substantive, systemic:** every option is one of the three. Symbolic choices raise visibility and lower credibility; substantive ones cost money or energy; systemic ones change a rule, a policy or a role, and keep paying off.
- **Reserve and team energy** are the +R of SMART+R made visible. A choice that cannot be afforded is greyed out; a year of unresourced goals ends near burnout.
- **The baseline matters:** a player who skips the baseline in October cannot report outcomes in July, whatever they choose then.
- **The debrief** names the three weakest domains and the chapter or tool to read for each. Playing every option as systemic reaches Level 3, the toolkit's target state, and not Level 4; that is intended.

Using the game in a workshop

- **Round one (10 min):** in pairs, discussing each decision before choosing.
- **Round two (10 min):** alone, trying to beat the pair's level.
- **Debrief (20 min):** compare end screens; which domain stayed lowest in most groups? Which month felt most like the real organisation? What would the real Board have said in month one?
- **Follow-up:** Tool 5 with the Board, then Exercise 4 (the bus test).

Play online

https://lagenerationdemain.org/downloads/SOS-Twelve-Months-game.html

Offline

Open the file SOS-Twelve-Months-game.html on any phone, tablet or computer. No internet connection is needed; a saved game resumes where it stopped.

Permanent home

The Online Sustainability Learning Hub (Activity 4 of the project), together with the toolkit and the editable Tools.

IN ONE SENTENCE

Readers remember the month they got wrong far longer than the chapter that explained it.

APPENDICES

Tools, Glossary, and References

Five practical tools, a digital library, a clean glossary, and a full reference list — the operational core of this toolkit.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Tool 1 — Operational Scope Decision Matrix. A 90-minute Board exercise to set current and target maturity per domain.

Tool 2 — Sustainability Coordinator Job Description. An adaptable, ready-to-use template with the authority clauses you should not delete.

Tool 3 — SMART+R Goal Planner. Seven test questions to validate every sustainability goal before you adopt it.

Tool 4 — SAIM (Implementation Matrix). Action × Owner × Deadline × Resources × Anticipated barriers and pre-planned mitigations.

Tool 5 — Symbolic vs. Substantive Audit. Five questions to score whether your sustainability work is real or performative.

Digital Library (QR codes), Glossary, References, Methodology Note, and Project Identity & Credits.

Tool 1 — Operational Scope Decision Matrix

Choose, for each of the six domains, where you start and where you commit to be in 24 months

Use this matrix at the start of your sustainability journey, ideally during a single 90-minute Board working session. Honest answers in the "Current Status" column are more valuable than ambitious ones — overstated baselines make all subsequent measurement meaningless.

Domain	Current Level	24-month Target Level	Key first action
A — Programming	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	Identify which existing programmes already address GreenComp competences; document them.
B — Internal Operations	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	Collect last 12 months of energy bills and travel records; establish baseline KPIs.
C — People & Competences	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	Self-assess all staff against the four GreenComp areas; identify training gaps.
D — Community	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	Map the 10–15 most important external stakeholders; document one engagement plan each.
E — Resources & Budgeting	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	Identify three procurement categories where TCO analysis would change supplier choice.
F — Management & Strategy	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4	Pass a Board Resolution adopting the SOS framework; create a budget line.

IN ONE SENTENCE

It is normal — and honest — for current and target levels to differ across domains; uneven maturity is expected.

Tool 2 — Sustainability Coordinator Job Description

A reference job description for the Coordinator role, adaptable to organisations of different sizes

This job description is provided as an editable template. Bracketed text [like this] should be customised to your context. Strike through any clauses that do not apply, but do not silently delete the authority clauses (Section 2) — they are the difference between a Coordinator and a figurehead.

1. Role purpose

The Sustainability Coordinator is responsible for designing, leading, and monitoring the implementation of the organisation's Sustainable Operating System (SOS), as adopted by Board Resolution dated [DATE]. The Coordinator ensures that the four Pillars (Governance, People, Operations, Monitoring) are operational, that the six Domains are systematically addressed, and that the organisation progresses through the maturity levels in a measurable way.

2. Reporting and authority

The Coordinator reports directly to the [Executive Director / Board], holds a permanent seat on the Management Committee (or equivalent), and is consulted on all major strategic, financial, and partnership decisions. The Coordinator may sign procurement decisions up to [€X] without further approval, and must be consulted on all procurement above this threshold. Time allocation: minimum [30%–60% for medium organisations; 10%–20% for small organisations] of a full-time post.

3. Core responsibilities

- **Strategic planning & monitoring:** Lead the annual cycle of the Sustainability Action Plan (Phases 1–6); maintain the Sustainability Performance Measurement System.
- **Capacity building:** Design and deliver internal GreenComp training; ensure new-hire onboarding includes sustainability competences.
- **Procurement:** Apply the Sustainable Procurement policy; conduct TCO analysis; review supplier compliance.
- **External reporting:** Ensure all EU and external reports include rigorous, evidence-based sustainability sections.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Map and engage external sustainability actors (municipality, partner NGOs, academic institutions).

4. Required competences and performance review

The Coordinator should have: technical knowledge of GreenComp, the European Green Deal, the Erasmus+ Programme Guide horizontal priorities, and the GHG Protocol (Scopes 1, 2, 3); methodological capacity to design and run training, manage cross-functional projects, and write evidence-based reports; and behavioural capacity to navigate organisational resistance, negotiate with finance and procurement, and influence without direct authority. The annual performance review should track: indicators tracked annually, movement of overall maturity score across the six domains, the Erasmus+ evaluation score for sustainability sections, and the percentage of staff trained in GreenComp.

Tool 3 — SMART+R Goal Planner

Validate every sustainability goal against the seven criteria before adopting it

A sustainability goal that fails any of these seven tests should be reformulated, not adopted. The "+R" (Resourced) test is the most important and the most frequently failed: if no money or staff time has been allocated, the goal will silently fail regardless of how SMART it looks.

Letter	Test question	Your answer for this goal
S — Specific	Is the goal stated in clear, unambiguous terms with a defined scope?	_____
M — Measurable	Is there a numerical or qualitative indicator that will tell us we have succeeded?	_____
A — Achievable	Is this realistic given our current capacity, partners, and external context?	_____
R — Relevant	Does this goal directly serve our mission AND align with EU green-transition priorities?	_____
T — Time-bound	By when, exactly, will this goal be achieved? (Specific date, not "this year".)	_____
+R — Resourced	Has a budget line AND staff time AND a Responsible person been formally assigned?	_____
Risk check	What would prevent this goal from being achieved, and what is our mitigation?	_____

Tool 4 — Sustainability Action Implementation Matrix (SAIM)

Plan each action with anticipated barriers AND pre-prepared mitigations

Use one row per major action. The crucial columns are "Potential Barriers" and "Mitigation Solutions" — the columns that most action plans omit. Pre-identifying barriers makes their appearance during execution feel expected rather than catastrophic.

Action step	Owner (RACI A)	Deadline	Resources needed	Potential barriers & mitigations
Conduct Phase 1 baseline assessment	Coordinator	Day 60	€800 external consultant; 40h staff time	BARRIER: Staff resistance to data sharing. MIT: Frame as institutional data, anonymised.
Adopt Sustainable Procurement policy	Board / Finance	Day 90	Policy template; legal review	BARRIER: Higher upfront cost. MIT: TCO analysis; phased rollout.
GreenComp training for all staff	Coordinator + HR	Day 180	Training budget €2,000; 8h per staff member	BARRIER: Workload pressure. MIT: Protected time; spread over 3 months.
Publish first sustainability report	Coordinator + Comms	Day 365	GRI template; design support; data validation	BARRIER: Incomplete data. MIT: Publish what is verifiable; flag gaps honestly.

Tool 5 — Symbolic vs. Substantive Audit

Five questions to test whether your sustainability work is real or performative

Score each row 1 (symbolic), 2 (partly substantive), or 3 (substantive). Add the scores at the bottom (5–15). A score of 7 or below means you are still operating mostly in the Symbolic mode — and the Board needs to know.

Indicator	Symbolic version (1 pt)	Substantive version (3 pts)	Your score & evidence
1. Sustainability presence	Mentioned on website / strategy.	Documented Sustainability Action Plan adopted by the Board with a budget line.	_____ / 3
2. Coordinator role	Named focal point with no protected time or authority.	Formal post (≥10% FTE) with budget signing authority and Management Committee seat.	_____ / 3
3. Measurement	Annual statement; no KPIs.	Documented baseline + at least 5 indicators reported annually.	_____ / 3
4. Procurement	Lowest-price purchasing.	TCO-based procurement with documented sustainability criteria.	_____ / 3
5. Reporting	Activity narratives in EU reports.	Quantified outcomes, GRI-aligned, with year-on-year comparison.	_____ / 3

Interpreting your score

5–7 points: Mostly Symbolic. Use the T-Minus 30 Protocol immediately.

8–10 points: Transitional. You have started; the structural work remains.

11–13 points: Substantive. Focus on consolidation and external accountability.

14–15 points: Embedded. Move toward Level 4 (Systemic Leader) ambitions.

Digital Library

QR codes to the game, the reference frameworks and the Erasmus+ platforms

Scan with a phone camera. The links are also printed in full so that they can be typed. The Online Sustainability Learning Hub hosts the toolkit, the game and the editable versions of Tools 1–5; its address is published on the partner websites and on the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform.

SOS: Twelve Months (the game)

The decision game that accompanies this toolkit. Ten minutes, phone or computer, online or offline.

https://lagenerationdemain.org/downloads/SOS-Twelve-Months-game.html

GreenComp (JRC publication)

The European sustainability competence framework (Bianchi, Pisiotis, Cabrera Giraldez & Punie, 2022). The reference model for Pillar 2 and for every learning outcome in this toolkit.

https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128040

GHG Protocol Corporate Standard

The accounting standard behind Scopes 1, 2 and 3 (Section 2.4). The chapters on organisational boundaries and the operational-control approach are the ones a youth organisation needs.

https://ghgprotocol.org/corporate-standard

Erasmus+ Programme Guide

The current Programme Guide: horizontal priorities (environment and fight against climate change), green travel rules, quality standards and reporting obligations.

https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide

Erasmus+ Project Results Platform

Where the toolkit, the Learning Hub and the project results are published after the project ends, and where other projects' toolkits can be found.

https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects

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Glossary

Key terms used across this toolkit, organised in three groups

Group A — Conceptual terms

Brundtland Definition

The 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development definition of sustainable development as meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. The ethical anchor of the toolkit.

European Green Deal (EGD)

The European Union's 2019 strategy for transforming the EU into a climate-neutral, resource-efficient economy by 2050. The binding policy framework for Erasmus+ sustainability work.

GreenComp

The European sustainability competence framework published by the Joint Research Centre (Bianchi, Pisiotis, Cabrera & Punie, 2022). Defines four areas of competence: Embodying Sustainability Values, Embracing Complexity, Envisioning Sustainable Futures, and Acting for Sustainability.

Just Transition

The principle that the move to a climate-neutral economy must be socially fair, leaving no person or region behind. Mandated by the European Green Deal.

Substantive vs. Symbolic Action

The distinction, drawn from organisational scholarship, between communications designed to project a green image (symbolic) and measurable resource investments into core operations (substantive).

Group B — Operational and technical terms

GHG Protocol — Scopes 1, 2, 3

The international greenhouse-gas accounting standard. Scope 1 covers direct emissions from owned sources; Scope 2 covers purchased electricity; Scope 3 covers value-chain emissions (travel, procurement, suppliers). For youth NGOs, Scope 3 is usually the largest category.

Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)

A procurement method that calculates the full lifecycle cost of a product (purchase + maintenance + disposal) rather than only the purchase price. Required for credible Level 3 sustainable procurement.

R-M-S-C-A-C principles

Six criteria for selecting good indicators: Relevant, Measurable, Simple, Comparable, Actionable, Cost-effective.

Inputs–Outputs–Outcomes (IOO)

A standard logic chain for measurement. Inputs are resources used; Outputs are activities delivered; Outcomes are the actual changes brought about. Funders increasingly require Outcomes, not just Outputs.

Theory of Change

A documented logic that explains how an intervention is expected to produce its intended outcomes, including assumptions and risks. Underpins contribution analysis.

PDCA cycle (Plan–Do–Check–Act)

A continuous improvement cycle. Validates the iterative nature of the SOS Roadmap; Phase 6 feeds back into Phase 1.

Group C — Strategic and toolkit-specific terms

Sustainable Operating System (SOS)

The central proposition of this toolkit: a four-pillar architecture (Governance, People, Operations, Monitoring) that institutionalises sustainability inside an organisation, replacing "hero management" with system management.

Six Domains of Activity

The six categories used in this toolkit to map organisational activity: Programming, Internal Operations, People & Competences, Community, Resources & Budgeting, and Management & Strategy.

Four-Level Maturity Model

The staged model used consistently across this toolkit: Level 1 Emerging (compliance-only), Level 2 Developing (defined roles), Level 3 Integrated (the target state), Level 4 Advanced (systemic leader).

SMART+R

An enhanced version of SMART goal-setting with an explicit "Resourced" criterion: every goal must have a budget line, staff time, and a Responsible person assigned at the moment of adoption.

SAIM (Sustainability Action Implementation Matrix)

The planning tool (Tool 4 in the appendices) that requires the identification of resources, anticipated barriers, and pre-planned mitigations for every action.

T-Minus 30 Protocol

Three governance actions to be executed within 30 days of reading this toolkit: pass the Board Resolution, appoint the Coordinator with real authority, commission the Phase 1 baseline.

References

Full author lists, EU citation format, URLs where available

This reference list follows the Interinstitutional Style Guide of the Publications Office of the European Union. Where DOIs or persistent URLs are available, they are included. EU legal acts are cited with their Official Journal reference.

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E. Earlier Erasmus+ outputs referenced in this toolkit

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A reference list is not bureaucratic ornament — it is the signature of intellectual honesty in a publicly funded document.

Methodology Note

How this toolkit was developed, and what its limitations are

Development process

- **Step 1 — Literature review:** A structured review of the academic literature on organisational sustainability, the European sustainability competence framework, and the relevant EU policy framework (Green Deal, Just Transition, Erasmus+ Programme Guide horizontal priorities).
- **Step 2 — Partner consultation:** A series of working sessions among the three partner organisations (DASEIN e.V., Youth Council Next Generation Skopje, Association la Génération de Demain) to test the framework against the operational reality of three different national contexts.
- **Step 3 — Internal piloting:** Selected sections of the toolkit (the six-domain model, the maturity scale, the T-Minus 30 Protocol) were piloted internally within partner organisations during late 2025 and early 2026.
- **Step 4 — Micro-example synthesis:** The composite micro-examples that appear throughout the chapters were developed to illustrate the framework. They synthesise patterns observed across multiple organisations and do not refer to specific real entities. The partner reflections in Part IV are the partners' own statements.
- **Step 5 — Interactive layer:** nine workshop exercises, the SOS Game and the Digital Library were added so that the toolkit can be used in a workshop and on a phone, as foreseen in the project application. The game was tested in automated playthroughs for balance (all-systemic play reaches Level 3; all-symbolic play stays at Level 1).
- **Step 6 — Translation and adaptation:** summaries in German, French and Macedonian are included; full translations and the editable Tools are published on the Learning Hub.

Limitations we acknowledge

- **Geographic coverage:** The toolkit is informed primarily by experiences in Germany, North Macedonia, and France. Other national contexts may require adaptation.
- **Micro-example status:** The micro-examples are composite illustrations, not longitudinal real cases; they should be read as illustrations rather than as evidence.
- **Maturity model subjectivity:** The maturity model is qualitative. We do not provide a numerical scoring rubric; reasonable observers may place the same organisation at different levels.
- **Scope:** The toolkit deliberately addresses the organisational level. It does not address the project level (individual mobilities) or the system level (national policy reform).
- **Language:** the full text is in English. The four-language summary and the Learning Hub translations are the entry points for readers who work in German, French or Macedonian.
- **Field data:** the case-study frames in Part IV are completed from the Community Sustainability Action Programme after its last workshop (31 October 2026); until then, they are frames, not findings.

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Honest acknowledgement of limitations is part of the substantive — not symbolic — sustainability practice this toolkit recommends.

Project Identity & Credits

The partnership behind this toolkit

DASEIN e.V.
Germany

YC Next Generation
North Macedonia

Génération de Demain
France

Project

Building Sustainable Communities (Erasmus+ KA210-YOU-5C1F6C00, Call 2025 Round 1). Submission ID 1667023. Duration: 1 September 2025 – 28 February 2027. Lump sum: €60,000. National Agency: DE04 – JUGEND für Europa.

Partnership

- **DASEIN e.V. (Germany):** Applicant and project coordinator. Lead organisation for project management (kick-off meeting and consortium coordination) and for the Online Sustainability Learning Hub.
- **Youth Council Next Generation Skopje (North Macedonia):** Partner organisation. Lead organisation, under the grant agreement, for the activity "Creation of the Interactive Sustainability Toolkit", and for community-level field action and dissemination in Skopje and the Western Balkans region.
- **Association la Génération de Demain (France):** Partner organisation. Lead organisation for the Community Sustainability Action Programme and for Dissemination, Evaluation and Monitoring. Lead author of this toolkit, responsible for the conceptual framework, the SOS architecture, and the editorial process.

Lead author

Martin Tasevski, on behalf of Association la Génération de Demain, with editorial input from the project consortium. Publication year: 2026.

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Contact

For questions, comments, feedback on the game and the exercises, or requests to translate this toolkit into other languages, please contact the consortium through the lead partner DASEIN e.V. or through any of the partner organisations listed above.