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Sustainable development in the media. Experiences from the implementation of the international SUMED project

Abstract
The dynamically changing media environment, encompassing modern technologies, including artificial intelligence, and new modes of communication, raises questions about the relevance of teaching methods in professions connected to the media, particularly in synergy with the goals of sustainable development. This is a discourse not only on the environmental aspects of media activity but also on professional ethics and workplace culture, organizational models, professional responsibility, equality, integration, inclusiveness, and wellbeing. How should future journalists, public relations specialists, media relations professionals, and others working in media be educated? How can we develop future-oriented competences and create a responsible and inclusive media environment? This article attempts to address these questions based on the experiences of the international project SUMED – Sustainable Multidimensional Media Contents, involving partner universities from Poland, Spain, Malta, and Finland[1].

Keywords: sustainable development, media education, professional ethics, wellbeing, green transition.

[1] The educational project SUMED – Sustainable Multidimensional Media Contents was implemented within an international partnership under the Erasmus Plus Programme, priority: Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education. The project leader was Innocamp Pl Ltd (Poland), operating within the Ashoka network and specializing in social innovation projects. The project partners were European universities: University of Gdańsk (Poland), Turku University of Applied Sciences (Finland), University of Malta (Malta), Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain). The project lasted three years, from 1 November 2022 to 31 October 2025.

**Zrównoważony rozwój w mediach.
Doświadczenia z realizacji międzynarodowego projektu SUMED**

Streszczenie

Dynamicznie zmieniające się środowisko mediów: nowoczesne technologie, w tym sztuczna inteligencja i nowe sposoby komunikacji, sprzyjają stawianiu pytań o aktualność metod nauczania w zawodach związanych z mediami w synergii z celami zrównoważonego rozwoju. Jest to dyskurs nie tylko o środowiskowych aspektach medialnej aktywności, lecz także o etyce i kulturze pracy, modelach organizacyjnych, odpowiedzialności zawodowej, równości, integracji, inkluzwności czy wellbeingu. Jak kształcić przyszłych dziennikarzy, specjalistów public relations, media relations i w innych zawodach medialnych? Jak budować kompetencje przyszłości oraz przyjazne i odpowiedzialne środowisko medialne? Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na te pytania w oparciu o doświadczenia z realizacji międzynarodowego projektu SUMED – Sustainable Multidimensional Media Contents, z udziałem partnerów z uczelni z Polski, Hiszpanii, Malty i Finlandii[2].

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważony rozwój, edukacja medialna, etyka zawodowa, dobrostan, zielona transformacja.

Introduction

Integrating elements of sustainable development into media education responds to the growing expectations of both society and the labor market. Organizations increasingly seek specialists who understand technological, social, cultural, and environmental challenges and are able to incorporate them into communication practices. Several areas should be reflected in curricula: ecological awareness in media production (green filming, carbon footprint analysis)[3], socially responsible communication and narratives surrounding CSR and ESG[4], counteracting greenwashing in advertising and PR wellbeing and digital hygiene in media work[5], as well as the development of digital competences.

[2] Projekt dydaktyczny SUMED – Sustainable Multidimensional Media Contents był realizowany w ramach międzynarodowego partnerstwa, w Programie Erasmus Plus, priorytet: Cooperation partnerships in higher education. Liderem projektu była organizacja Innocamp Pl Spółka z o.o (Polska), działająca w sieci Ashoka, specjalizująca się w projektach innowacji społecznych. Partnerzy projektu to europejskie uczelnie: Uniwersytet Gdański (Polska), Turku University of Applied Sciences (Finlandia), University of Malta (Malta), Universitat Politecnics De Valencia (Hiszpania). Projekt trwał trzy lata: od 1 listopada 2022 do 31 października 2025 roku.

[3] See.: K. Hayward, *Green filmmaking. A guide to sustainable movie production*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London–New York 2025, p. 168–174. A. Wróblewska, *Zrównoważona produkcja filmowa w Polsce. Geneza i perspektywy*, „Zarządzanie w Kulturze" 2021, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 365–383.

[4] *Ø.* Ihlen, J.L. Bartlett, S. May, *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility*, Wiley Online Library 2011, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118083246.fmatter (accessed on: 20.08.2025).

[5] See: M. Deuze, *Considering mental health and well-being in media work*, "Australian Journalism Review" 2023, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp. 15–26, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371517565_Considering_mental_health_and_well-being_in_media_work (accessed on: 20.08.2025); M. Deuze, *What Makes You Happy also Makes You Sick: Mental Health and Well-Being in Media Work*, "International Journal of Communication" 2025, Vol. 19, pp. 501–521.

The international project SUMED – Sustainable Multidimensional Media Contents responds to these educational needs in the media sector and the civilizational challenges associated with sustainable development. It integrates the perspective of sustainability with media education through the development of curricula, pilot courses, and cross-sectoral collaboration. The project's concept was initiated by educators from Turku University of Applied Sciences (Turku UAS), who reflected on the challenges of contemporary media education within a rapidly evolving professional environment. In addition to the pressure of keeping pace with technological change, there is an increasing difficulty in responding to ongoing proposals for collaboration from media industry partners. These limitations are both technical and institutional. The constant emergence of new media formats and production technologies requires educators to continually update their competences, yet many lack the time or support to learn and integrate these tools into teaching. At the same time, rigid program structures and insufficient mechanisms for incorporating external perspectives further complicate efforts toward effective collaboration with the professional environment. These challenges are consistent with the findings of S. Ankrah and O. Al-Tabbaa, who identified numerous structural and cultural barriers in university–industry relations[6].

This article advances the thesis that media education must evolve not only in response to technological change but also in alignment with the goals of sustainable development and the realities of professional life. Its main objective is to present experiences from the implementation of the SUMED project of selected examples. The cases of Turku University of Applied Sciences, as the project's initiator, and the University of Gdańsk, provide insight into both the Polish perspective and potential avenues for educational change. An important factor in this choice is that Finland is recognized as a global leader in both innovative educational tools and the implementation of sustainable development goals in education.

New media formats, green transition, and wellbeing in the media sector as a perspective for change in media education

The media sector is undergoing continuous transformation in terms of content formats, production technologies, and distribution channels. One significant trend is the growing importance of audiovisual production across multiple platforms, including social media, streaming services, and digital marketing environments[7]. These changes require professionals, as well as teachers and students, to adapt to new tools, workflows,

[6] S. Ankrah, O. AL-Tabbaa, *Universities–industry collaboration. A systematic review*, "Scandinavian Journal of Management" 2015, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 387–408, https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SCAMAN.2015.02.003 (acccessed on: 25.08.2025).

[7] R. Sheng, *Exploring Modern News Formats: Evolution, Impact, and Future Directions*, "Global Media Journal" 2024, Vol. 22, pp. 72–467, https://doi.org/10.36648/1550-7521.22.72.467 (accessed on: 10.08.2025).

and expectations. Technologies such as artificial intelligence increasingly participate in processes of editing, personalization, and content distribution, while the sheer pace of change itself poses a challenge. Keeping up with evolving practices requires not only technical skills but also the ability to critically assess the social and environmental consequences of media work.

A bibliometric analysis by B.M. Alwan, H.M.H. Mansoor, A.M. Al-Shami and M.A. Alquaary, underscores the fragmented nature of research at the intersection of media and sustainable development. The authors point to the need for more integrated approaches that combine media competences, sustainability knowledge, and skills in the use of artificial intelligence to address the complexity of contemporary media environments[8].

Despite its digital character, media production continues to generate a significant environmental footprint. Streaming services, cloud storage, and server infrastructure consume large amounts of energy, contributing to carbon emissions. Even seemingly immaterial processes, such as video distribution, rely on energy-intensive systems, including server cooling and data center maintenance[9]. Audiovisual production, particularly in film and television, comprises complex supply chains that generate emissions at every stage, from pre-production to distribution[10]. These impacts are often overlooked in educational contexts, where sustainability has not yet been systematically integrated into media curricula.

Educational institutions thus play a crucial role in shaping ecological awareness and practices among future media professionals. Incorporating environmental perspectives into film and media studies is essential to prepare students for a sector moving toward more sustainable models[11]. However, as shown by comparative studies of European media education programs, sustainability-related issues remain marginal in most curricula, appearing in only 6–14% of modules[12].

Another key dimension is occupational health and wellbeing, which form critical components of sustainability in media education and practice. The media industry

[8] B.M. Alwan, H.M.H. Mansoor, A.M. Al-Shami, M.A. Alquaary, *Bibliometric analysis of the media-sustainable development nexus: mapping trends and future directions in Discover Sustainability*, "Springer Nature" 2025, Vol. 6, No. 1, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-025-01642-7 (accessed on: 10.08.2025).

[9] R. Istrate, V. Tulus, R.N. Grass, L. Vanbever, W.J. Stark, G. Guillén-Gosálbez (2024). *The environmental sustainability of digital content consumption*, "Nature Communications" 2024, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 1–11, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-47621-w (accessed on: 10.08.2025).

[10] H. Vaughan, P. Kääpä, M. Hjort, *'Film education and the environment' – Special issue of the Film Education Journal*, "Film Education Journal" 2025, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 1–4, https://doi.org/10.14324/fej.08.1.01 (accessed on: 10.08.2025).

[11] M. Cook, M., *Changing the climate of teaching: embedding sustainability into film and media studies*, THE Campus Learn, Share, Connect 2025, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/changing-climate-teaching-embedding-sustainability-film-and-media-studies (accessed on: 10.08.2025).

[12] M. Karmasin, D. Voci, *The role of sustainability in media and communication studies' curricula throughout Europe*, "International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education" 2021, Vol. 22, No. 8, pp. 42–68, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-10-2020-0380 (accessed on: 10.08.2025).

is known for its demanding work culture, often characterized by long hours, tight deadlines, and emotional strain. These conditions can lead to burnout, anxiety, and other mental health challenges affecting both students preparing for media careers and professionals already working in the sector.

Practical outcomes of the SUMED project

An integral element of the SUMED project activities was the development of concrete solutions to support the modification of existing curricula or the creation of new ones, incorporating aspects of sustainable development (curricula re-design) in media-related study programs. To this end, surveys and consultations were conducted with external partners (employers from the media and media production sector), a review of existing curricula in selected media programs was carried out, consultations with academic teachers were organized, and criteria were developed concerning knowledge, skills, and social competences that reflect the goals of sustainable development.

As a result of these efforts, new or modified curricula were prepared, on the basis of which 11 pilot courses for students were implemented. In addition, 7 courses were conducted that explicitly integrated the professional media environment and external partners. In total, nearly 500 students participated in the pilot courses and learning environment pilots.

The coordination of these activities carried out by Turku UAS included the operation of the Sustainability Laboratory, which served as a collaborative platform for teachers from partner institutions, providing support, exchange of experiences, and the development of strategies for integrating sustainability into media education. The laboratory included seven online meetings devoted, among others, to collecting feedback, discussing sustainable development goals, and reflecting on the role of institutions in their promotion.

At the partner universities, ten workshops for academic teachers were also designed and delivered, aimed at strengthening competences in media education and innovative teaching methods[13].

The pilot courses and workshops implemented by Turku UAS and UG within the media environment are presented in Table 1.

[13] It should be noted for clarity that educational materials were also prepared for selected pilot courses, three booklets were published presenting good practices in media education, sustainable development, and modern didactic approaches, and work is currently underway on e-learning courses (MOOCs – Massive Open Online Courses).

Table 1. Pilot courses within the SUMED project at the University of Gdańsk and Turku University of Applied Sciences

Turku University of Applied Sciences	Number of teachers	Number of students	Number of working life representatives
1. **Media Space**: learning environment pilot	2	26	4
2. **Podhouse**: learning environment pilot	2	20	2
3. **Responsible media**: pilot course	2	16	7
4. **Leading Teams in media**: pilot course	2	21	0
5. **Organisational Change in media organisations**: pilot course	2	40	0
University of Gdańsk	**Number of teachers**	**Number of students**	**Number of working life representatives**
1. **Sustainability and market-driven journalism**: learning environment pilot	1	10	4
2. **Student media: journalism in a friendly environment**: learning environment pilot	4	10	2
3. **Media relations**: pilot course	1	30	2
4. **Public relations**: pilot course	1	21	0
5. **Project seminar**: pilot course	1	9	2
6. **Tabloids and tabloidisation**: pilot course	1	23	0

Source: own study.

Media Space – The Social Dimension of Sustainable Development in Media Education

The learning environment pilots at Turku UAS within the framework of the SUMED project emphasized the importance of sustainable ways of working in the media, including workload rhythms, work-related wellbeing, and eco-emotional awareness. A prime example was the Media Space course, in which students carried out real-life media and communication tasks commissioned by external partners. The course was designed to simulate authentic work processes, enabling students to develop practical skills in a structured yet flexible environment that fostered collaboration and professional growth.

Drawing on project-based experiences, students identified areas requiring improvement and participated in discussions on the selection of the most relevant topics. Together with their teachers, they analyzed possible solutions related to process transparency, role clarity, and psychological safety. The need for clearer guidelines in relationships with external clients was also recognized.

The pilot examined sustainable practices in media content creation, focusing on interpersonal dynamics, psychological safety, and inclusive collaboration. The pilot addressed these needs by developing structured methods of communication and feedback. One of the main innovations was the introduction of the "feedback tree," a tool designed by students to facilitate dialogue and collective reflection after project completion.

The Media Space work model begins with a briefing phase, including preliminary research, familiarization with the client, and defining the project scope. This is followed by a creative session aimed at open participation and idea generation, minimizing hierarchy and focusing on content. In the counter-briefing phase, ideas are jointly tested and evaluated, with an emphasis on selecting a coherent concept that integrates the contributions of all participants. The client pitch stage represents external communication: the team presents the selected solution and responds to client feedback. During the production phase, roles are assigned, internal schedules are established, and tasks are distributed according to the agreed structure, with ongoing feedback and revisions. The delivery stage concludes the production process, followed by the final evaluation and documentation phase, which includes the use of feedback tools and collective discussion of educational experiences. This model also incorporates a framework of psychological safety, considered essential for supporting participation and role clarity throughout the project[14]. Within the context of Media Space, the development of feedback practices and clearly defined roles supported these stages, creating an environment in which students could freely express ideas, analyze challenges, and engage in collaborative problem-solving.

Project Seminar – practical preparation for entering the media job market

All pilot courses implemented at the University of Gdańsk within the framework of the SUMED project for the Journalism and Social Communication program had a strong practical dimension, including the Project Seminar. Its primary objective was the development of student projects, which simultaneously constituted diploma theses.

The seminar work was organized in several stages, in accordance with the Gantt project management methodology[15]. In the initial phase, students identified the topics of their projects and established their connections with sustainable development issues. After selecting the topics, they conducted in-depth research covering both the theoretical dimension (state of research) and the practical dimension (articles, reportages, journalistic books, online sources). In the following stages, they developed a project card and designed an action plan. The implementation process involved the creation of a practical project in a chosen form (reportage, interview, podcast) accompanied by a comprehensive project description divided into theoretical and practical sections. A key stage was the implementation and presentation of the project – the premiere of a reportage, film, or podcast with an audience – followed by evaluation through surveys, media visibility analysis, and audience feedback.

[14] T.R. Clark, *The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, New York 2020.
[15] *Gantt Charts. 20 Przykładów wykresów Gantta do zarządzania projektami*, ClickUp 2025, https://clickup.com/pl/blog/23345/przyklady-wykresow-gantta (accessed on: 5.08.2025).

The thematic scope of the projects encompassed ecological aspects as well as socially significant issues. Students worked in line with professional journalistic standards and ethical principles. As a result, the following projects were produced: a film reportage on the advantages and disadvantages of electric cars; a radio reportage on abortion in Poland; a radio reportage on the phenomenon of seeking casual relationships via dating platforms; a series of television interviews with Muslim women living and working in Poland; a podcast series promoting sustainable tourism; and a film reportage on nutrition in hospitals and prisons. Importantly, all reportages, podcasts, and interviews were disseminated through the University of Gdańsk's media, as well as on external online platforms and social media, where they remain openly accessible.

The most effective teaching method proved to be project-based learning, consistent with its fundamental assumption of student activation in the educational process. Nevertheless, other methods were also employed, including individual and group work, discussions, problem-solving tasks, case studies, multimedia presentations, and workshops with professionals from the media sector. Students continuously monitored the progress of their projects during the seminar and constituted the primary audience for their practical outputs. A supportive learning environment was created, encompassing open discussion, feedback from the seminar instructor, and expert support.

A considerable part of the practical training took place in the modern laboratories of the University of Gdańsk: fully professional and well-equipped radio, television, and photography studios, which significantly enhanced the quality of education and better prepared students for entering the media job market.

Summary

According to reports by the OECD and the World Economic Forum, the key competences of the future encompass the following areas: social (inclusiveness, diversity), ecological (environmental awareness), digital (ESG reporting, data analysis), ethical (counteracting manipulation), and personal (psychological resilience, stress management, wellbeing)[16]. All of these areas were incorporated into media education within the SUMED project, with the main objective being the synergy of media education and the principles of sustainable development.

Some courses addressed this issue directly, such as the role of the media in shaping values related to sustainable development, while others approached the theme in the context of professional practice, e.g. media relations, team management, and organizational change in the media. The scope of discussions also included: the green transition and CO_2 awareness, occupational health and safety, digital transformation, sustainability reportages, cultural diversity, social equality, participation, wellbeing, professional development, and visual and film communication in ecological contexts. Within the learning

[16] *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*, World Economic Forum, Geneva 2020, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2020.pdf (accessed on: 10.08.2025).

environment pilots, processes of guidance, support, and media content creation were developed in a more sustainable way. Methods of measuring and reporting sustainability were also introduced. A strong emphasis was placed on sustainable work practices in the media sector as well as occupational health and safety.

The evaluation of student courses and teacher workshops conducted within the SUMED project indicated the need for certain changes[17]. Survey results revealed that students declared a significant increase in their knowledge of sustainable development, particularly in relation to workplace wellbeing, social aspects, and inequality issues. They pointed to a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability as a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing not only environmental but also social, cultural, and economic dimensions. They emphasized the importance of communication, cultural activities, and professional practices grounded in social responsibility and pro-ecological narratives. Furthermore, students highlighted the need for a better work-life balance, more practical tools for implementing sustainable practices, and greater knowledge of carbon footprints and corporate ecological initiatives.

Teachers, in turn, expressed strong commitment to further developing sustainability within their courses, planning to introduce new modules in media education, including those dedicated to SDG indicators, ESG reporting in cooperation with industry experts, and student wellbeing.

In the coming years, more time within courses should therefore be devoted to discussing and exploring issues of sustainable development in social and economic contexts, since these are still most often associated solely with ecological aspects. It is also advisable to continue working with students through project and workshop-based methods, as these have proven the most effective in achieving learning outcomes and enhancing student skills. Equally valuable is the collaboration with external experts, who introduce students to the realities of professional practice in journalism, PR, and film production.

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[17] The surveys completed by students and teachers after the courses were anonymous and consisted of two parts. The first included closed-ended questions assessing students' and teachers' opinions regarding the increase in their awareness of sustainable development. The second, open-ended part provided detailed feedback on the implemented issues, participants' expectations, and self-assessment of their achievements.

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